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# DIVE Destinations

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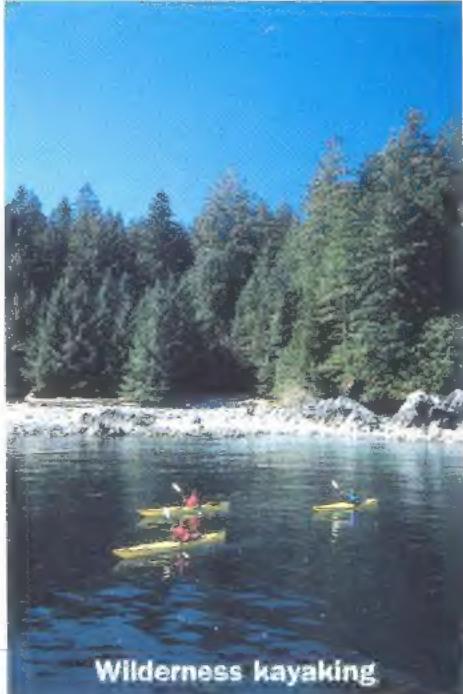
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Dive in the emerald sea

Photos by Brendan O'Brien

Rendezvous Dive Ventures



# Introduction



Welcome to Dive Destinations, the sequel. Yes, this is the second edition of the most comprehensive guide to diving around the world and it is also a new and improved model.

This edition has a number of refinements, including month by month temperature guides, and plenty more information about the diving each area offers. Where appropriate we have also detailed one special dive to give you a feel for the place.

Inside you'll find general travel information, country details and the sort of diving you can expect from a host of different regions. The majority of countries that offer diving are featured and many come with listings of dive centres, hotels and tour operators.

All the information is once again bang up to date and much of the information has been changed as things have changed over the last year.

Dive Destinations isn't just a brochure for far flung countries too expensive to reach. Inside you'll find details of Mediterranean locations, European locations and African locations as well as all those places you've dreamt of visiting, but can't really persuade the bank manager.

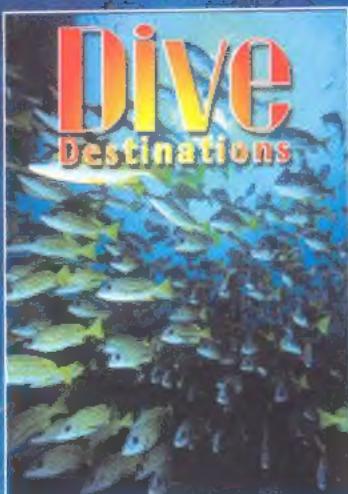
Over the last few years diving has grown hugely across the globe and every year more and more areas upgrade their services or new ones open up. This supplies us divers with an endless stream of well maintained and serviced resorts as well as new ones to keep our adventurous spirit alive.

So when you are looking for that next diving holiday pay attention to the unusual destinations in here. They are not always too far from Britain and many don't cost the earth.

Whatever you choose, thank you for buying a copy of Dive Destinations and happy diving.

Gavin Parsons  
Editor

*All the information in this guide has been carefully checked for accuracy; however, we cannot guarantee the information. Things do change, so please use Dive Destinations as it was intended – as a guide. Check with your travel agent or the local tourist information office (or embassy) before making your travel plans.*



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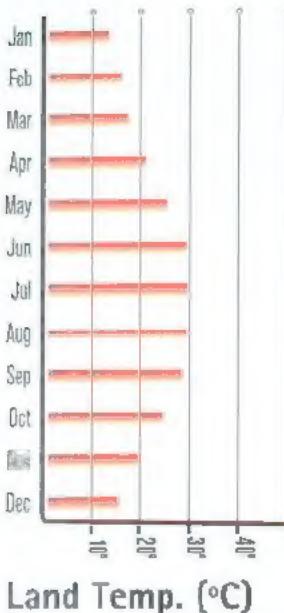
## Insurance

# Africa





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| 2  | Suez         | 13 | Dahab           |
| 3  | Cairo        | 14 | Luxor           |
| 4  | Ras Mohammed |    |                 |
| 5  | Quseir       |    |                 |
| 6  | Aswan        |    |                 |
| 7  | Port Said    |    |                 |
| 8  | Sidi Barrani |    |                 |
| 9  | Damietta     |    |                 |
| 10 | Lake Nasser  |    |                 |
| 11 | Hurghada     |    |                 |



**How to get there** ➔ There are now a couple of charter flights into either Sharm el Sheikh or Hurghada (the two main airports). The airlines change from time to time, but for the most part flights are on a Friday to Hurghada and Saturday to Sharm. Sometimes, especially during busy periods, you can go via Eilat. With the border now open a few operators fly you into Eilat and either bus you across to Sharm or you can get a taxi. If you are diving away from these resorts a bus transfer is usual.

**Entry requirements** ➔ UK passport holders require a visa, which costs £10 and is bought at the airport in Egypt. Buying a visa is a bit of a scrum and time consuming, but your tour operator representative will often help you through the process.

**Climate** ➔ In the spring, winter and autumn Egypt is hot to warm. The nights are pleasantly cool in the winter, but storms can hit early in the year causing severe damage to buildings and roads. In the summer the air temperature can reach into the 40s centigrade and a blisteringly hot wind off the desert blows almost constantly.

**Inoculations required** ➔ If you are staying at a resort or on a liveaboard no inoculations are required, but pack stomach blocking tablets (Imodium or Arret) just in case

**Language** ➔ Arabic is the traditional language, but English, German, French and Italian are widely spoken

**Currency** ➔ The Egyptian pound is the legal tender, but at the main resorts and dive companies, the US dollar is the preferred currency. Ensure you have plenty of small change as larger notes are not always favoured by the taxis, buses and in shops for inexpensive services and goods.

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Egyptian State Tourist Office, Egyptian House, 170 Piccadilly, London W1V 9DD, Tel 0171 493 5282.

## The country

The dive resorts of Sharm and Hurghada, the two most frequently visited destinations in Egypt are not like the rest of the country. The influx of tourists from around the world has created a multi-cultural society and affluent local traders. There is still poverty, however, but crime isn't a problem and nor is harassment, unless you are against being enticed into one of the many jewellery shops and trinket bazaars.

Reefs are incredibly colourful all over the Red Sea





*Trucks on board the SS Thistlegorm, still parked where they were over 50 years ago*

Further afield, in smaller towns and out in the desert, you will find a more relaxed and Egyptian way of life, although along the Red Sea coast it is hard to find any culture that hasn't been touched by the western diving influence. Because of this dependence on tourism and the knowledge among the locals that tourists have money, you will find them very friendly and welcoming, particularly if they are trying to sell something. But this isn't always the case. Egyptians are a congenial bunch and seem to welcome the influx of westerners like no other nation bordering the Red Sea.

At the moment, diving activity is based in the north; the south is said to be opening up this year when conservation measures have been taken. At the time of writing only a handful of liveaboards have the permits to travel south. However, the diving fraternity is slowly pushing that way and with the proposal for new international airports in the south, it is certain that Safaga, Quseir and Marsa Alam will start to develop fast. At present the only way to reach these towns is by mini-bus transfer from Hurghada.

As well as the diving, Egypt obviously has a lot of history to share. The ancient city of Luxor is only a few hours away and excursions can easily be taken from Hurghada to see the temples and ruins of the old city. At present, because of the terrible incident last year, Luxor is suffering from a lack of westerners. The situation is now said to be stable and again safe for tourists. Sadly though, any nation living on a religious knife edge will from time to time encounter fundamentalists. But it wasn't so long ago that visitors to London were wary of a bomb going off. So you have to ask the question: just how safe are you anywhere?

Other activities available in Egypt include windsurfing, snorkelling or just lazing around in the sun.

A trip to Egypt is best organised in the UK and with a reputable company who is ABTA bonded. There are several bucket shops selling tours to the Red Sea, but these are best avoided because of the poor standard of

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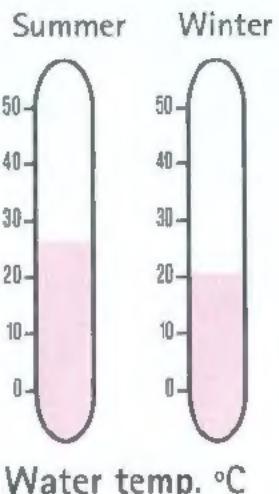
# Egypt

accommodation you receive and the quality of the diving operations they use. Because it is such a lucrative area there are plenty of companies to choose from. Many offer different services, but generally all offer different locations, land-based and liveaboard options, and some even go so far as to arrange specialist courses such as marine biology, underwater photography, shark watching and wreck diving. To find these companies check out the diving press such as *Sport Diver* magazine.

## The diving

The Egyptian Red Sea offers divers a mix of wrecks and reefs, which both have one thing in common – they are teeming with life. The Red Sea has been a major world shipping route for many years and bottlenecks at the entrances to the gulfs of Aqaba and Suez mixed with dangerous reef systems throughout have caused many vessels to flounder and sink. For the diver this is excellent, because most of the wrecks are well within safe diving limits and full of life.

Egyptian Red Sea diving is split into several geographical areas – Dahab, Sharm el Sheikh, Hurghada, El Qusier and the south. Each area has its own reefs and wrecks, which the day boats all visit. As the industry has flourished however, this has made the popular dive sites around Sharm and Hurghada become overcrowded, but measures are underway to alleviate some of the problem. On the one hand you have the dive centres forming groups such as HEPCA (the Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association) laying down mooring buoys, educating boat captains and dive guides to protect the coral and one the other there are



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various liveaboards searching for new uncharted sites. Now, if you have visited Hurghada and Sharm before, you may think this is impossible, but there are still many wrecks and reefs awaiting discovery even in the north.

Here's a look at the diving in the most popular areas:

Sharm el Sheikh is the main dive resort, but is actually several kilometres north at Na'ama Bay, but that is neither here nor there. Sharm has very good access to many areas around the Sinai Peninsula including the Straits of Tiran and the world famous Ras Mohammed Marine Park. Day boats even make the long journey to the wreck of the *Thistlegorm* from Sharm, although it does entail leaving before first light and not getting back until rather late.

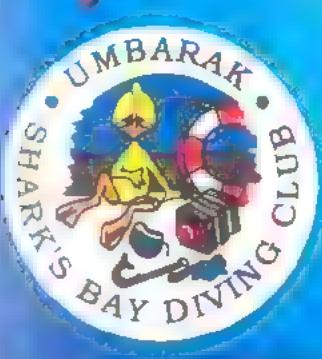
The Straits of Tiran are home to some impressive sites including the group of reefs named Jackson, Thomas and Gordon. Here you find several wrecks, one still perched on top of the reef that caught it.

Further south on the very tip of the peninsula is the Ras Mohammed Marine Park. This huge protected area encompasses both water and land and is a conservation oasis. The diving here is based around the magnificent wall, but there are many other sites on smaller reefs that extend from the main wall. Currents are common here and they bring in many large pelagics such as jacks and barracuda. There used to be sharks here, but they were scared away by too many divers long ago.

What's left though are incredible coral formations, abundant fish life and plenty of great experiences. You will always find an inquisitive napoleon, generally spot a hawksbill turtle and more than likely encounter a shoal of barracuda circling overhead.



## SHARK'S BAY Resort



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# Egypt

As stated, it is possible to reach the wreck of the *Thistlegorm* from Sharm, although it is much better to dive here from a liveaboard which can get you there before the day boats arrive and after they have departed.

The *Thistlegorm* is considered the most stimulating wreck in Egyptian waters. It was a World War Two British supply ship, but now lies in 33m of water and is packed with all sorts of war supplies from BSA motorbikes and Bedford trucks to machine guns and shells. Unfortunately, it has seen much better days and the waves of divers and dive boats are destroying her.

Another good wreck and liveaboard dive site here is at Abu Nuhas reef. It is the last resting place of several good wrecks, notably the *Giannis D*, the *Carnatic*, the *Chrisola K* and the *Olden Ail* these wrecks are within diveable limits and offer a vast range of diving experiences.

The northern limit of day boats out of Hurghada is Carless Reef, which is often subjected to choppy seas. This means hordes of day boats cannot swamp it and so it has remained remarkably well preserved. Its corals are in excellent condition and the fish life is very good.

There are some very good reefs in the Hurghada area and even several that don't get dived too much. In the past, however, Hurghada's reefs suffered from a basic lack of conservation, now all that is changing with the HECPA organisation. Things are improving with anchor buoys on reefs and a strict look-but-don't-touch policy being instilled into the dive guides.

For several years the diving industry has been spreading itself south to find original diving outside the mainstream. It has found a new centre in El Qusier and has started to build. Here you can find a couple of hotels

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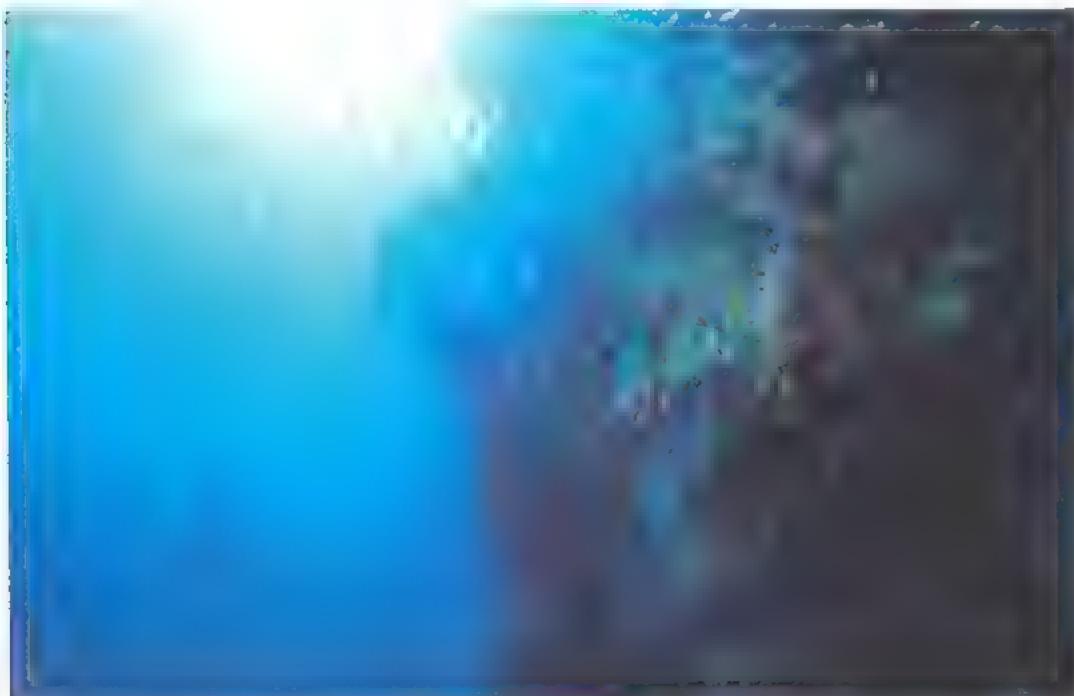
# Egypt

with land-based dive centres and a couple of live-out-in-tents dive centres. All offer superb diving from either boats or the shore. The reefs here are, so far, unspoilt and perhaps the lessons learned from areas further north will be implemented here. Encouragingly, anchor buoys are already being installed in the southern reefs.

In the southern part of the country you will find an incredible array of world class reefs. Names such as Elphinstone, the Brothers, Zabargad and Rocky Island are all bandied around like mythical gods, but several liveaboards have been diving them for years. Strict new regulations, however, are soon to be enforced that will make reaching the south harder for cowboy operations. Boats will have to meet tough minimum standards and conservation of the reefs will be paramount.

The diving here is often quite tough with currents and strong winds to whip up the sea and deep water. Wall diving is very common, but the diversity of life is much greater than anything further north. The diving industry here, consists of liveaboards and the area is still very much uncharted. St John's reefs system, right near the border with Sudan, is a cornucopia of developing reefs that are still being discovered and dived.

**Diving packages available** ➤ Diving in the Red Sea is a multi-faceted industry. There are regular day boat packages where the diver stays in a hotel on land and leaves the dive centre's dock each morning, dives twice and then returns in the afternoon. Alternatively, staying on land, there are jeep safaris where you travel the desert coast, dive from the shore and sleep under the amazing light show of the stars in the clear desert sky. The last option is a liveaboard which can head either north or south. These get you to reefs far out of the reach of day boats meaning you get the best diving. This latter option is the dearest of the three, but also the best for hardened divers. However, the Red Sea is not a mill pond, although the sun virtually always shines, the wind very often blows whipping the Red Sea into a mass of waves. Travelling on this can be uncomfortable and not for those prone to seasickness.



Wall diving is found all throughout Egypt

- 1 Norah
- 2 Dahak Kebir
- 3 Asmara
- 4 Ras Dorma
- 5 Ras Shiekh
- 6 Mitswa Channel
- 7 Keren
- 8 Nakfa
- 9 Massawa



**How to get there** ➔ There are a few carriers to Eritrea, including Egypt Air, Ethiopian Air and Lufthansa. It isn't possible to fly direct as yet and transfers can sometimes be long, so it is best to plan your trip carefully.

The international airport is located near the capital of Asmara, which sits on a high plateau in the country's interior. The diving centre is at Massawa, a town on the coast about 70 miles away. It may be only 70 miles as the crow flies, but the altitude drops nearly 3000m and the road between the two places is a collection of switch back bends and steady drops. It can take a bus up to five hours to make the journey.

**Entry requirements** ➔ A visa is required, full details are available from the Consulate, send SAE for details.

**Climate** ➔ Being this far south into Africa means that the summer is brutal and temperatures can reach above 50°C on the coast. In winter, this thankfully drops to a beautiful 25-30°C. The interior though, because of its elevation, is much cooler and even reaches freezing in the winter.

**Inoculations required** ➔ Typhoid, tetanus, Hepatitis A, polio.

**Language** ➔ Arabic is the official language, but English is widely understood, especially in the main towns.

**Currency** ➔ The local currency is the Nakfa, but tourists are expected to use the US dollar in hotels, many restaurants and the few resorts.

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Eritrean Consulate, 96 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF. Tel 0171 713 0096.

## The country

Before 1993, Eritrea was part of Ethiopia, although the Eritreans had been fighting for 30 years not to be. When at last independence was won, the country faced the gruelling task of rebuilding itself. Thankfully, it has one big asset – a coastline on the Red Sea, one of the most popular dive spots in the world.

The Eritrean government sensibly did not simply fling open its doors and invite every Tom, Dick and Harry with a set of scuba equipment in to trash the coral. Firstly, it decided to get some scientific research done. It was helped in this by a group from Aberystwyth University, who were the first westerners to conduct any marine biological research in this part of the Red

# Eritrea

Sea. Their main area was around the Dahlak Archipelago, which just happens to be the area that is slowly opening up now.

Eritrea itself is a funnel-shaped country with an extensive Red Sea coastline. In fact, the Eritreans were so efficient at taking their land that Ethiopia no longer borders the Red Sea at all. The country is bordered in the north by Sudan and in the south by Djibouti. It lies about as far south in the Red Sea as you can get and is home to a mix of peoples – mostly Christians and Muslims.

A trip to Eritrea isn't as cheap as you may think. Sure, life here is quite basic and living standards leave a lot to be desired, but there are high prices to be paid if you are a visitor. As well as shelling out for a visa, divers must pay LS\$10 per day to dive here, and that's on top of the cost of the trip itself.

## The diving

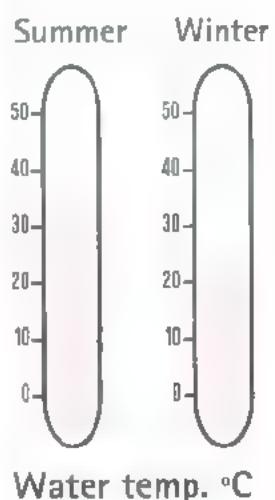
Unlike much of the Red Sea, Eritrea lies on a shallow plateau and so has no great drop offs or stunning ocean-like visibility, for that matter. This means the water can in places get very warm and a planktonic soup forms that drastically reduces the visibility. Diving here at times, is like swimming through green watery soup. The frequent bad visibility also prevents huge amounts of coral growth and gives Eritrean waters a very different look from the rest of the Red Sea.

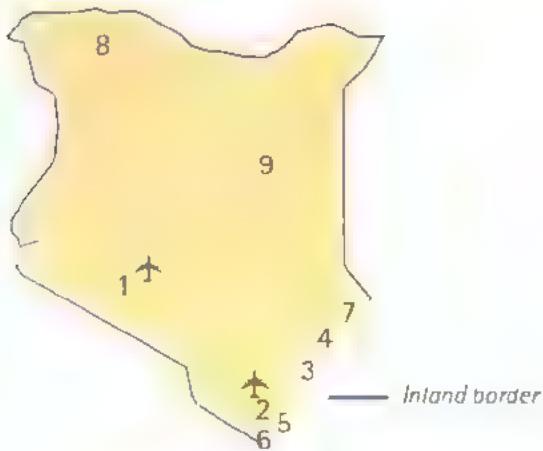
Divers should, therefore, take their minds off the bigger picture and concentrate on the marine life which is stunning here. Protected by almost 30 years of war, the fish and invertebrate species have bloomed. All the reef fish that are normally caught – big parrotfish, surgeonfish and groupers are all abundant and so too are snappers and jacks. Sharks are the only thing that are surprisingly scarce. Yemeni shark fishermen have targeted this area

heavily and shark sightings are nowhere near as common as they once were.

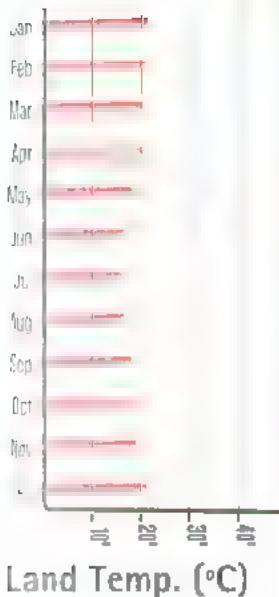
Benthic life tends to feature creatures that do well in nutrient rich environments – seafans, sponges and soft corals all do well here, but hard stony reef builders do not because of the lack of strong sunlight.

Diving facilities are surprisingly good. Most operations are run by ex-navy divers, but recreational facilities are becoming more prevalent. There's a hotel and dive centre on the main Dahlak Island where there are plenty of places to dive and more are planned. As you can imagine, an industry as young as this is still finding its feet – as well as dive sites. Let us hope the country opens up a little more in the near future.





- 1 Nairobi
- 2 Mombasa
- 3 Malindi
- 4 Formosa Bay
- 5 Kilindini
- 6 Vanga
- 7 Lamu
- 8 Lake Rudolf (Turkana)
- 9 Habaswein



**How to get there** ➔ There are regular flights from Heathrow to Nairobi and Mombasa. Air carriers include British Airways, Emirates Air, Gulf Air, Kenya Airways, Air France and Olympic.

**Entry requirements** ➔ For short stays, only a passport is required.

**Climate** ➔ Kenya's climate ranges from desert in the north east, through temperate highlands to a hot and humid tropical coast. There are two rainy seasons to look out for. In January and February the country is hot and dry, March to May is hot and wet when the 'long rains' move in and from June to October the temperature drops slightly, making life more bearable. The 'short rains' arrive in November and December but the warm weather stays.

**Inoculations required** ➔ Hepatitis A + B, typhoid, tetanus, polio, rabies and anti malarial tablets.

**Language** ➔ Swahili is the official language, but English is a second language here.

**Currency** ➔ Kenya shilling

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Kenyan Tourist Office, 25 Brooks Mews, London NW1Y 1LF. Tel 0171 355 3144.

## The country

Kenya is one of the best known African countries in Britain – and for good reason. It was one of the first African nations to open its doors to tourism and one of the first to recognise the benefits of its natural resources. Now Kenya is the wildlife safari capital of the world and plays host to thousands of visitors per year for that reason alone.

Yet interior safaris aren't all the country has to offer. Kenya lies along the East African coastline which meets the balmy, tropical Indian Ocean and as such has some excellent diving opportunities.

But for a country of its size, Kenya has a surprisingly small share of coastline thanks to Somalia, which eats into most of this coastal region. What it lacks in quantity though, it makes up for in quality. It has the warm and coral-rich Indian Ocean at its door step and an infrastructure to deal with many thousands of visitors per year – only a handful of African countries can make that claim.

Mombasa is the central hub of the dive industry in Kenya and the place most divers end up at or start off from. You can fly directly into Mombasa

# Kenya

these days and while you are here take some time to explore the place.

Mombasa is one of the oldest cities in East Africa. The original old town dates back some 700 years to the days of the Arab traders, but there is evidence to suggest that a settlement was here long before that.

The town is fascinating and a combination of old and new. It is a bustling place with plenty to see, do and buy.

## The diving

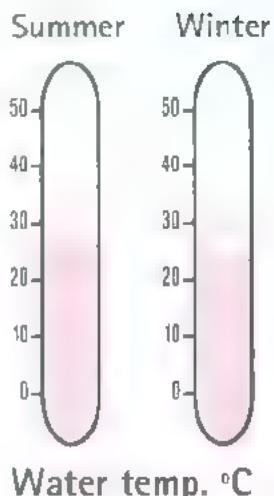
You can really group Kenya's diving into three areas – Mombassa, Malindi and Ukunda. There is very little diving done in the northern part of the coastline because of the region's remoteness and the fact that Kenya's northern neighbour, Somalia, has been somewhat less than stable.

Mombasa is probably the best known and best established diving area in the country, but because of this it did suffer from over diving in the eighties and early nineties. Things, however, are improving. The government has banned all coral and shell collection and other areas are opening up, which is relieving the pressure slightly. Diving attitudes are also changing across the board and divers are generally better educated in the need to treat the underwater environment with sensitivity.

Ukunda is a little further to the south and includes the Diani Beach area. This section of white sandy beach has had a few problems in the past with unscrupulous dive centres masquerading as something they are not, but again the situation has now improved.

Malindi is really the unsung wonder at the moment. Watamu and Turtle Bay form a marine park here and offer some of the best diving in the country.

The majority of Kenyan diving is shore-based using day boats. There are some liveaboards, but these tend to head for the Pemba Channel in Tanzania



to the south.

The day boats take divers out to the offshore reefs that protect the coastline – a journey of between 30–45 minutes – but timing is critical. For, unlike the Red Sea and other tropical areas, the coastline experiences a huge tidal flow. Everyday the tide flows in and out with a massive fluctuation in water level. At low tide the beaches are left high and dry and the water over the barrier reefs is often too shallow to navigate in a boat. Therefore, you only ever get two dives a day in Kenya and other East African countries.

The reefs of Mombassa are full of hard stony corals, which are quite low-lying to the sea floor because of the ocean swells. There are plenty of fish here and if you are lucky you may get the chance to see a whale shark as it meanders up the coast.

**Walindi and Turtle Bay**, about 60 miles north of Mombasa are where the majority of Kenya's diving is found in the northern half of the country. They have the same diverse range of marine life, but with an added bonus – it is all protected by law.

The diving is very similar in look all down the coast because it is subjected to the same conditions. The coral formations are also similar and consist of drop offs, walls, classic reefs and gentle sloping banks. The species found here tend to be the slower growing, harder varieties that can survive in the pounding Indian Ocean swells which can be felt as far down as 20m at times.

Being right on the ocean does have its bonuses though. Without having to travel too far divers have the chance to see the large pelagic species such as manta rays, whale sharks, tiger sharks (if you want to be that crazy) and even sailfish and sunfish. These creatures regularly parade past the coast on their way up or down Africa and can often be spotted just off the reef.

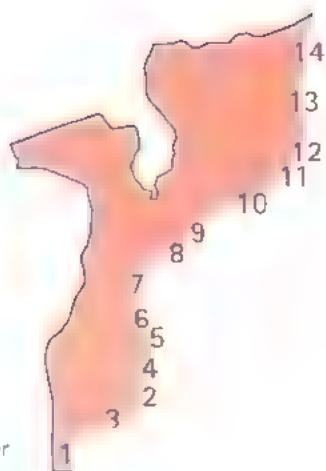
*Kenyan reefs are lower lying thanks to the strong surge of the Indian Ocean*



# Mozambique

- |                         |                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 <i>Maputo</i>         | 12 <i>Moçambique</i> |
| 2 <i>Inhambane</i>      | 13 <i>Pemba</i>      |
| 3 <i>Manjacaze</i>      | 14 <i>Mo'cimboa</i>  |
| 4 <i>Massinga</i>       |                      |
| 5 <i>I. do Bazaruto</i> |                      |
| 6 <i>Nova Mambone</i>   |                      |
| 7 <i>Beira</i>          |                      |
| 8 <i>Chinde</i>         |                      |
| 9 <i>Quelimane</i>      |                      |
| 10 <i>Moma</i>          |                      |
| 11 <i>Quinga</i>        |                      |

— Inland border



**How to get there** ➔ The easiest way to reach Mozambique is to fly into South Africa and drive in. Several South African tour companies run trips into the south of the country. South African Airways and British Airways have direct flights to the main South African cities. Cheap flights may involve one or more changes.

**Entry requirements** ➔ A visa is required and the most up-to-date information is available from the Mozambique Embassy.

**Climate** ➔ Most of Mozambique is within the tropical zone, but the far south is sub-tropical. However the warming effects of Indian Ocean air and sea currents keep the temperatures up.

**Inoculations required** ➔ Tetanus, typhoid, Hepatitis A, polio and yellow fever is recommended.

**Language** ➔ Portuguese. Makua and Tsonga. English is understood in the south.

**Currency** ➔ The metical

**Tourist Authority** ➔ None

## The country

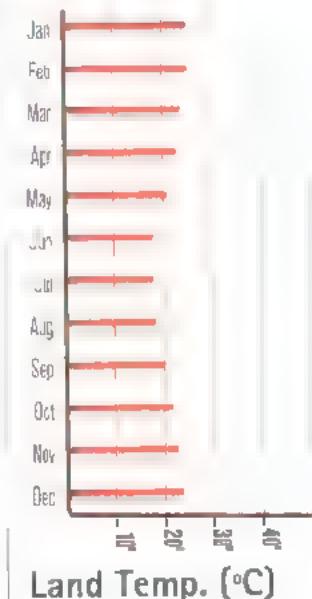
Mozambique is sandwiched between South Africa and Tanzania. At present it's dragging itself out of a 16 year civil war which left the country devastated, both financially and morally. The capital, Maputo, in the far south, is the only place where tourists are really catered for, but even here facilities are pretty basic.

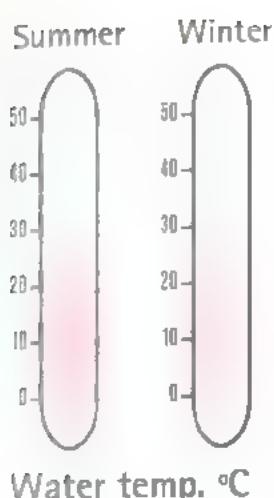
Travelling too far from Maputo is considered dangerous. Although the interior situation is now stable there are still hundreds of thousands of landmines scattered about and many fields are unmarked.

Violence is becoming a problem in towns, although these days police and soldiers patrol the streets so the situation may be improving.

Out of town, with a good guide, the countryside of Mozambique is very much like the rest of Africa and the people are generally warm and friendly. Yet the scars of war still show in bullet-ridden walls, abandoned houses, landmine warning signs and telephone poles with no wires.

Many tourists, especially divers, come into Mozambique from South Africa. They drive up through the border or take a small plane and are basically self-sufficient units. Ponto do Ouro is one of the main centres for diving in Mozambique and now the hotel is reopening.





## The diving

Before the civil war Mozambique was a very popular holiday destination for South Africans wanting a break from the restrictions of apartheid. Since peace in 1992, the country has started to reestablish its tourist industry and diving seems to be one of the first areas opening up, thanks mainly to a few South African operators leading specialist tours into southern Mozambique.

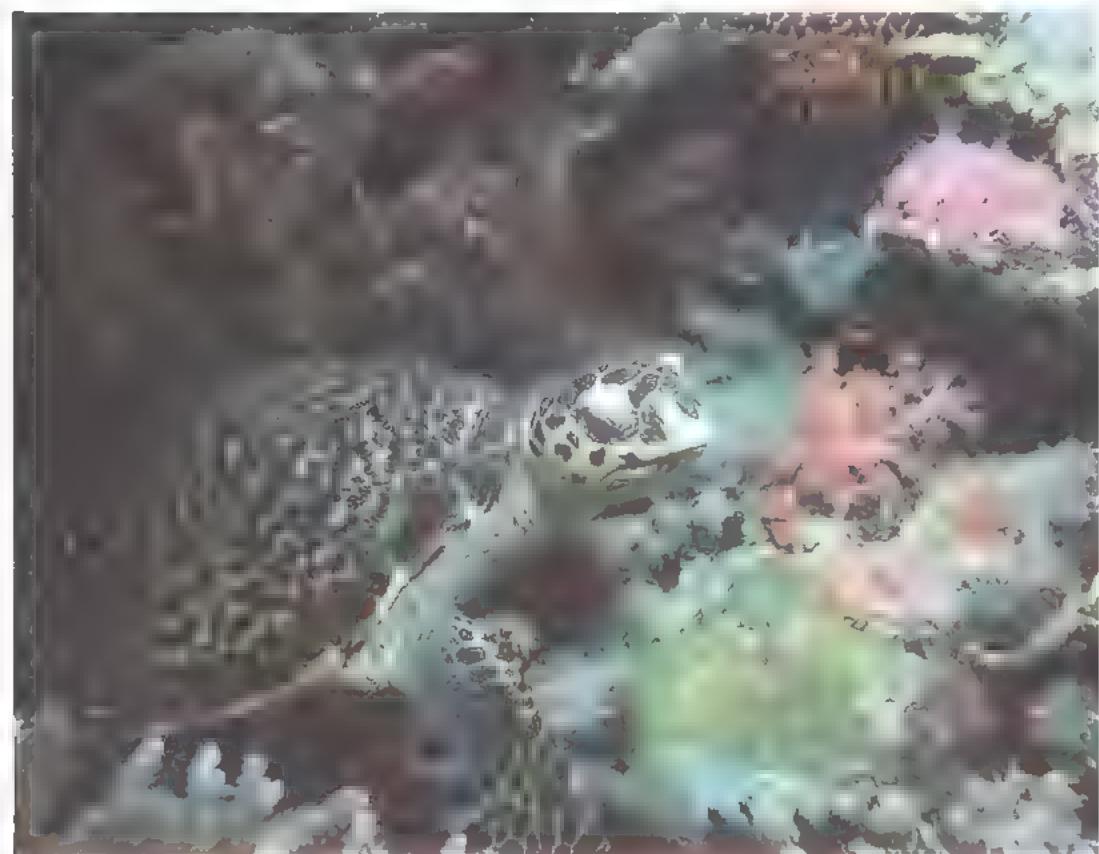
A handful of resorts are now in operation and the coastline near Maputo, just a few miles inside Mozambique from South Africa, is a favoured diving spot with a number of attractions including shark sightings and friendly huge potato cod. The civil war took a heavy toll on the country, but luckily the marine habitat does not seem to have suffered any bad effects. In fact, the truth is to the contrary. Shark sightings in certain spots are almost guaranteed with bulls, silvertips and ragged teeths all putting in an appearance.

As with its northerly neighbour, Tanzania, the coast is made up of a broken barrier reef which protects mile upon mile of sandy beach. The reef isn't too far offshore either, making the rather bumpy boat journey a lot less taxing than at other destinations.

The area is often hit by the rather hefty swells thrown in by the mighty Indian Ocean and launching a RIB can be a tricky affair, but that is half the fun of diving here. The other half is actually seeing the pristine coral formations and the abundant fish life.

Over the last year whale sharks have been discovered and one South African enterprise has launched a tagging campaign. It uses microlights to spot the sharks which guide the boats in. Divers then snorkel with the creatures and insert special tags.

Mozambique is an excellent place to dive if you are with a reputable company which has intimate knowledge of the country.



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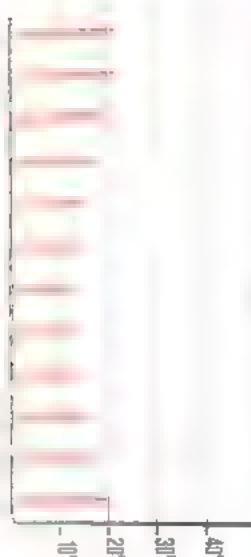
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  - 10 Port Shepstone
  - 11 Umzimvubu
  - 12 King William's Town
  - 13 Alexandria
  - 14 George
  - 15 C. Agulhas
  - 16 C. of Good Hope
  - 17 Alexander Bay
  - 18 Vredenburg
- Inland border**

## Cape Town



## Land Temp. (°C)

## Durban



## Land Temp. (°C)

**How to get there** ➔ South Africa runs frequent scheduled flights to Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. From these international airports it is easy to catch either onward internal flights or buses, trains and taxis to your ultimate destination.

**Entry requirements** ➔ British citizens do not need a visa, although a passport and return or onward travel ticket is required.

**Climate** ➔ Technically, much of South Africa lies below the tropical belt that surrounds the Equator, but because of warm Indian Ocean currents washing southwards from the tropics, the eastern coastline feels sub-tropical. The western side is subject to cool currents washing up from Antarctica which create a completely different and cooler environment on this side of the country.

The climate in the south is very much like Britain in that it exhibits four seasons. However, unlike Britain, the extremes in temperature and weather conditions are nowhere near as bad and, of course, being on the other side of the world, the seasons are in reverse of our own. Summer runs from November to February and the winter from May to July. The other times are spring and autumn. Much of the climate around the coastal zones is dominated by the ocean currents.

**Inoculations required** ➔ No inoculations are required in the towns but it is worth checking with your GP if you intend to visit the countryside.

**Language** ➔ There are 11 official African languages in South Africa as well as English and Afrikaans.

**Currency** ➔ The rand is the legal tender and these days changing money isn't a problem.

**Tourist Authority** ➔ South African Tourist Board, 5 and 8 Altgrove, London SW19 4DZ. Tel 0181 944 8080.

## The country

South Africa is probably one of the best known countries in the world, but for all the wrong reasons. Since the end of apartheid and political isolation, the country has worked hard to re-establish its tourist industry, focusing on the natural beauty South Africa possesses. The country is now seeing something of a boom in its eco-tourism trade. Safaris are big business in the national parks, as are adventure holidays and diving tours.



# South Africa

Cape Town



As a country, South Africa is vast and has coastlines on two oceans – the Indian and the Atlantic – and a varied environment, which is home to a multitude of wildlife.

Because of the centuries of western influence, South Africa feels a little like a home from home. It is a very westernised country on the whole and extremely efficient. Travelling is no problem and the whole tourist infrastructure equals and even surpasses anything the western world can produce. That means there is a host of accommodation from top class hotels to backpacker's hostels and camping. However, there are still extremes of wealth and severe poverty is common. Many South Africans still have virtually nothing, but in time this should change.

The coast of South Africa is split into distinct zones – Western Cape, the Garden Route, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Each of these areas has its own particular characteristics and even a month in South Africa is not long enough to see it all.

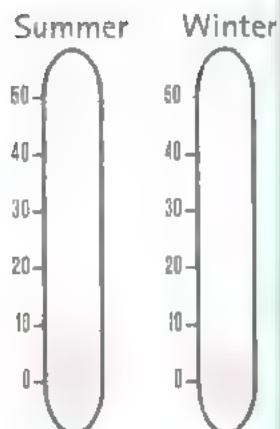
The Western Cape features Cape Town, the home of the world famous Table Mountain. It lies on the Atlantic coast and so is pretty cool.

Cape Town has plenty to offer the visitor, including a climb up the mountain a hike around the Good Hope nature reserve or a visit to a host of other attractions.

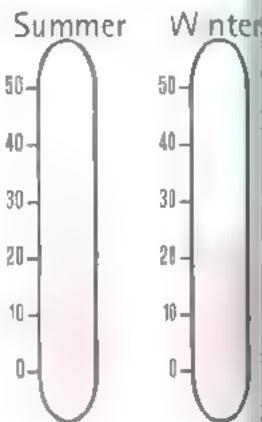
The Cape is the most southerly section of the African continent and has a number of good dive locations, yet very little in the way of big towns, so nature is very much the order of the day.

The Garden Route is so named for its beautiful scenery and the wild flowers which blossom in profusion at certain times of the year. Beaches and underwater scenery add to the beauty. It is a regular hot spot for visitors and South Africans alike and a haven for divers.

The Eastern Cape is South Africa's first stretch of coastline washed by Indian Ocean currents, and it is here that the water and climate starts to warm up. The scenery also changes. It gets more rugged, but there are also more rivers that drain into the ocean, reducing visibility, and so it is best to



Durban



Water temp. °C



dive here in the drier winter months.

Kwazulu-Natal is South Africa's most tropical region and is the home province of Durban. Here the diving is tropical and very, very popular. The area is very fertile and heavily farmed, yet the country has still found room for several national parks – but then, safari money probably makes more profit than bananas and sugar cane.

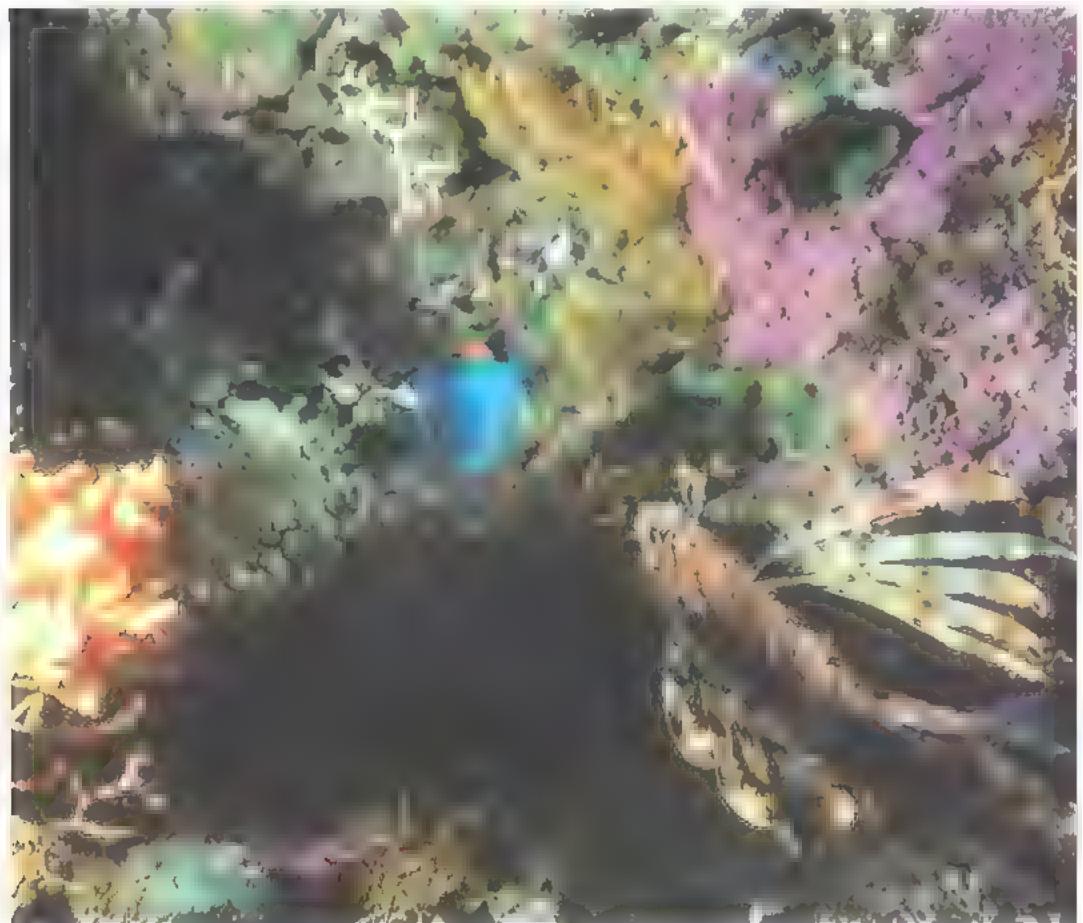
In all, South Africa is a fascinating and varied country with so much to offer divers and non-divers alike. It is easy to reach, easy to get around and relatively safe, especially in the Cape area.

## The diving

Just like the land, South Africa's underwater world is extremely diverse and incredibly exciting. Although the country hasn't been considered a diving destination in past years, a good diving infrastructure, similar to Britain's has evolved. With the changes in the country's politics, more and more visitors are coming to its shores and creating a new wealth in the diving industry. PADI, the Professional Association of Diving Instructors, has created a new user-friendly infrastructure and so more opportunities are opening up for travellers. Several companies are now offering tours to South Africa and many are also including wildlife safaris in the deal.

As for the diving, well, where to start? Probably with the mother of all dives – a face to face encounter with the great white shark. This is possible off Dyer Island – a huge seal colony where at certain times of the year the magnificent sharks come in to feed.

South Africa was the first country to pass protection laws for the great white and an extensive tagging programme is in operation at the moment.



# South Africa

However, there are now too many operators offering the white shark expeditions and, at times, dive boats out number the sharks. And, being quite shy, they retreat. However, plans are afoot to make the Dyer Island area (one of the main white shark sites) a marine reserve and limit the number of boats operating at any one time.

The better operators don't bait the sharks and, therefore, you see them naturally rather than wound up and ready for a fight. This is not only a lot more environmentally sound, but also only available at certain times of the year, for example when the seals are pupping.

Sharks feature heavily in South African diving. The waters are a haven for these creatures and many encounters can be experienced. Apart from the great white, you can also find shoals of ragged toothed sharks on the Protea Banks during the winter and spring months and most other shark species found in South African waters can pop up almost anywhere at anytime.

Other high points of diving in South Africa are the large collections of fish, the proliferation of colourful invertebrates and the diverse habitats that the coastline exhibits.

Some of the most famous South African dive sites include Sodwana Bay in the north east, the reefs around Durban, the Protea Banks, Port Elizabeth, Mossel Bay, Plettenberg Bay and the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve.

All these areas have some of the best diving the country has to offer and the choice is so wide and varied that one trip probably will not be enough for a diver to say they have been there and done that.

The style of diving is quite different from many other places in the world. Getting to a site from a sandy beach is often a question of logistics, the love of roller coasters and the ability to hang on. You see, huge swells often roll onto South Africa's golden beaches, making them heaven on earth for surfers, but bad for boat launching. Do not be deterred. The South Africans have made it their business to overcome the problem and now they are very proficient at getting out into the calmer water beyond the surf zone, but the experience can be a little rough at times.



- (N.E. SUDAN)
- 1 Port Sudan
  - 2 Suakin
  - 3 Khaiig Aqiq
  - 4 Khaiij Dungunab
  - 5 Ras Hadarba
  - 6 Ras Abu Fatma
  - 7 Marsa Sha'b
  - 8 Delou
  - 9 Omdurman
  - 10 Khartoum
  - 11 Atbara
  - 12 Kassala

**How to get there** ➤ A tricky one this. It depends on the route taken by the national carrier Sudan Airways. Sometimes you can fly to Rome and connect to a flight straight to Port Sudan, otherwise you can take a flight from London to Khartoum and then onto Port Sudan. However, flights into Sudan are unpredictable and help, once you are on the ground, is not always forthcoming.

A better bet may be to fly into Khartoum with one of the European airlines such as Air France or Lufthansa and take an internal flight to Port Sudan. This year there is another way. There is a flight from Cairo to Port Sudan. It is only available through a couple of tour companies so look for details in the diving press such as *Sport Diver* magazine.

**Entry requirements** ➤ You need a visa from the Sudanese consulate in London. This can take several weeks to organise, so prepare a while in advance. Don't try to obtain a Sudanese visa in Cairo because you could wait for months and even have your application refused.

**Climate** ➤ Sudan is blistering hot in summer and hot in winter. The wind during the winter can become very strong and usually comes down from the north whipping up the Red Sea into a roller coaster. The best place to be in the summer is out on the water where the heat isn't as intense and the flies cannot reach you.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None if you are on a liveboard.

**Language** ➤ Arabic is the main language, but you will find English speakers on the dive boats.

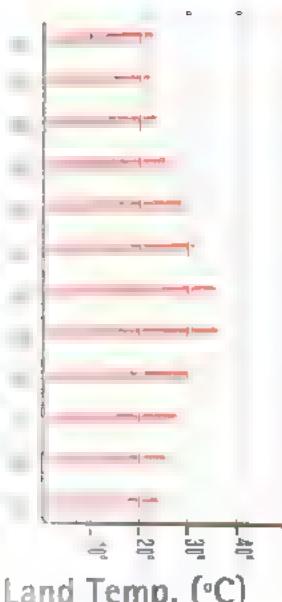
**Currency** ➤ Sudanese dinar but the most accepted currency is the US dollar.

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Sudanese Embassy, 3 Cleve and Row, London SW1A 1DD. Tel 0171 839 8080

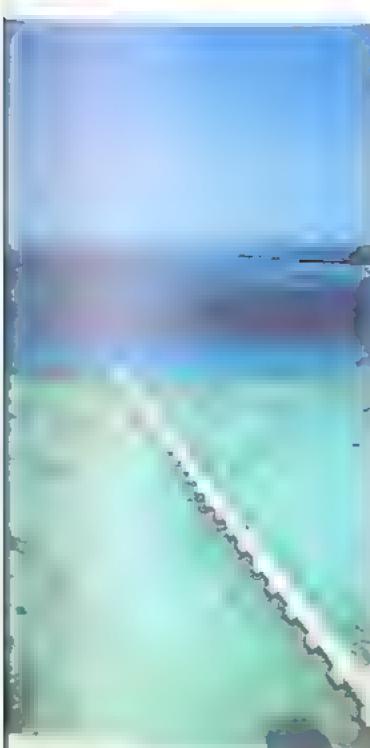
## The country

Sudan is a poor country. Getting to and around it can be problematical at best, although if you are booked on a liveboard, you will be met at Port Sudan airport, when you finally arrive.

Because much of the diving is done from liveboards you don't get to see too much of the country and its people. You tend to get a passing glimpse as you drive past in a mini bus. But you don't even have to get outside the



*The view from the top of the lighthouse at Sanganeb*



# Sudan

airport at Port Sudan before you see wild camels roaming around – it is rather bizarre like that. The countryside, like its neighbour Egypt, is desert, but unlike its neighbour, Sudan's desert hasn't been turned into mile upon mile of hotels and resorts.

The only real place of interest is the ancient trading town of Suakin, 36 miles south of Port Sudan. The place is more of a ruin now, but it was once a great trading port and was last used as a slave trade centre in the 19th century. If you come to Sudan be prepared for an adventure.

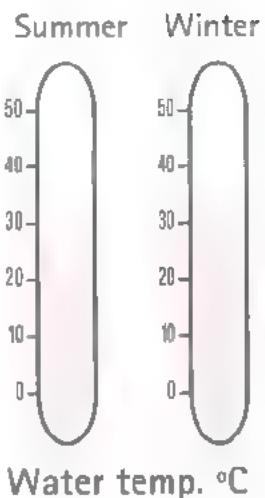
## The diving

Sudanese Red Sea diving is a legend all over the world. Although the diving here isn't seen by too many from Britain, many know the names of the sites such as Cousteau's Precontinent II experiment, the wreck of the *Umbria*, the reef at Sanganen and the Suakin islands. Because of the distance between the sites, the majority of divers use liveaboards, which start their journey from Port Sudan, unless they have motored down into Sudan waters from Egypt.

Pretty much all of the reefs in Sudanese waters rise up from the deep and create sheer walls, which just happen to be covered in coral. Wall diving is a speciality here, giving the diver the chance to see reef and pelagic species all within one small area.

As you move down the coast of Sudan from the north you are met by many atolls and small islands. One atoll, Meshareefa, attracts large numbers of plankton-loving manta rays at certain times of the year. This isn't a usual stop off for liveaboards, but if you do manage it at the right time of year you will not be disappointed.

A little further down is the wreck of the *Blue Bell*. She was a cargo ship



... diving is great in  
Sudan



carrying a consignment of Japanese cars, which now lie scattered over the reef and seafloor. She is a big ship, but is on the edge of recreational diving limits, so caution is required.

Sudan's most famous reef is Sha'ab Rumi. The name may not mean a lot to you, but it is the location of Jacques Cousteau's experiment in underwater living, which took place in 1963. Called Precontinent II, it was a small underwater village, for want of a better word, and some of its remains are still there to this day.

Sudan is also known for its shark population and the reefs of Sha'ab Rumi and Sanganeb each have a plateau where the sharks – normally grey reefs and silver tips – gather in quite large numbers. Here you do not need to feed them to get close.

You also have the opportunity to see giant hammerheads at various places, normally below 30m, although when wall diving, they sometimes come out of the depths to take a closer look, so always have one eye on the deep blue yonder.

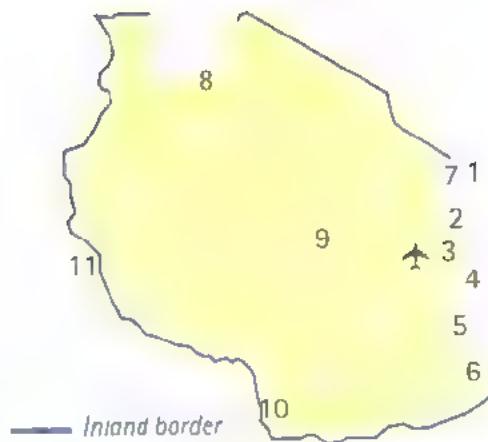
As well as amazing reefs, Sudan also has a famous wreck – that of the Italian war freighter, the *Umbria*. She was scuttled in 1940 at Wingate Reef, a safe mooring for container ships waiting to enter Port Sudan. Similar in awesomeness to the *Thistlegorm*, the *Umbria* hasn't suffered too much under the fins of divers and is an outstanding dive by anyone's standards.

Further south lie the Suakin Islands which offer some truly adventurous diving. The islands rise up almost sheer in many places from heady depths to form spectacular coral walls where divers can watch the pelagic life swim by. There are a number of plateaus with abundant coral heads. Ask anyone who has dived the Suakin sites and you will be met by a stream of superlatives about the area's beauty and abundance of life. Sharks, turtles, manta rays – the lot – are seen here.

They help to put Sudan into the category of a difficult but worthwhile destination. After all, if Cousteau thought it was worth staying here, who are we to argue?

# Tanzania

- 1 Pemba Island
- 2 Zanzibar I.
- 3 Dar-es-Salaam
- 4 Mafia I.
- 5 Kilwa Kivinje
- 6 Lindi
- 7 Tanga
- 8 Mwanza
- 9 Dodoma
- 10 Mbamba Bay
- 11 Tanganyika



**How to get there** ➔ A few airlines fly into Tanzania including South African Airways, Tanzania Air British Airways and Gulf Air. The airport is near the capital Dar es Salaam.

**Entry requirements** ➔ A tourist visa is required, which last for three months – contact the embassy for details. Entry to Zanzibar also costs check with embassy for current fee. A departure tax of US\$20 is also required.

**Climate** ➔ Tanzania has two seasons – dry and rainy. For most of the year the country is dry, sunny and hot, but in March and April the country is hit by rains. Storms are heavy and roads are often knocked out.

**Inoculations required** ➔ Hepatitis A + B, typhoid, tetanus, polio, rabies and anti malaria tablets.

**Language** ➔ Swahili is the official language, but most people in tourist areas speak some English.

**Currency** ➔ Tanzanian shilling

**Tourist authority** ➔ Tanzanian Embassy, 43 Hertford Street, London W1Y 8DB. Tel 0171 499 8951.

## The country

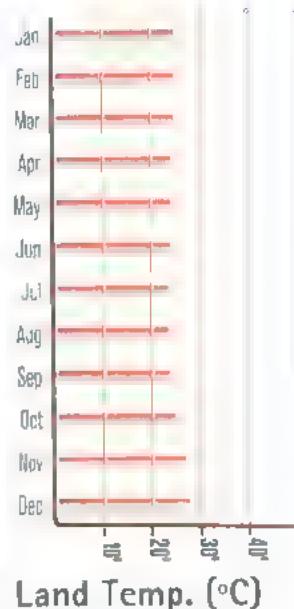
If Kenya is the world leader in safari holidays, Tanzania is not too far behind. The country has a vast national park scheme including parts of the Serengeti National Park and some outstanding wildlife reserves, all open to safari groups.

Among the country's natural wonders are Mount Kilimanjaro, parts of Lake Tanganyika and Lake Victoria and the Ngorongoro crater.

The country was actually part of German East Africa until World War I, when the British took it. It was under UN control as a trusteeship until the country's independence in 1961.

Apart from its land-based wildlife, Tanzania, like its other African neighbours, has some pretty spectacular dive sites too. The most well known is the Zanzibar/Pemba area near to the Kenyan border. This is where Tanzania's traditional diving area has been, but there are others, which are well worth a look.

Zanzibar is an ancient town that, before 1964, was actually a Sultanate under British Protection. The town is very African, but has many roots in the trade with Arab nations in centuries past. These days, Zanzibar is a tourist



Land Temp. (°C)

hot spot and has all the amenities you would expect – top class hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops, but it still has a traditional background that gives the town its character.

Zanzibar's 'brother' island, Pemba, lies further north and borders Kenyan waters. Pemba has only recently 'opened up' and is a journey back through time. The main centre is Chake Chake, where the airport is located. Pemba is the clove capital of the world, producing the largest quantity of the popular spice in its interior. Its primeval rainforest was cut down for this industry and now only a small pocket of virgin forest survives in the north of the island. Like its southern counterpart, Pemba has been inhabited for centuries and in fact the old Muslim fort is now a hospital.

The western side of the island is littered with hundreds of outlying islands which is where the visitor should head for.

In 1996, an area around a cluster of islands several miles out in the Indian Ocean from Dar es Salaam was designated a Marine Park, thanks to the efforts of British volunteer divers from the Frontier organisation. The main

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# Tanzania

island is Mafia and it makes a perfect spot for a dive holiday.

The island depends very much on its coconut plantations, but there is a hotel here, which does offer diving trips within the marine park.

The most popular areas at the moment for diving in Tanzania revolve around Pemba and Zanzibar, with Mafia coming in quite a way behind, but there is another area just coming on line. It is north of Dar es Salaam and has a couple of resorts. The Silver Sands seems to be the prime resort at the moment and is keen to promote itself as a diving resort.

## The diving

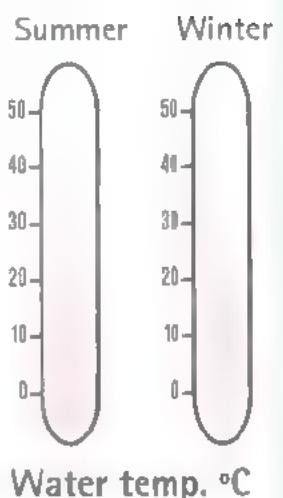
Starting in the north, the most spectacular dive site is the Pemba/Zanzibar Channel, which separates the mainland from the two islands. This is often accessed by liveaboard boats from Kenya, but you can also reach it from the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. The Pemba Channel is renowned for its big pelagic sightings as it is basically part of the Indian Ocean. Mantas, whale sharks and other shark species are common sights in this body of water.

The waters around Pemba and Zanzibar offer a host of diving opportunities from the classic Indian Ocean reefs to the more spectacular walls and drop-offs. The only way to reach this diving wonderland is by boat, but there are several reputable diving operators. Tourists were only allowed to reach Pemba a few years ago and so the industry is still in its infancy, but word is spreading and sites are opening up all the time.

The Mafia Marine Park, on the other hand, has a number of great dive sites, yet very few divers visiting them for pleasure. Most of the sites are within the natural bay formed by a number of outer islands, and so are sheltered and quite shallow. But there are several sites open to the Indian Ocean and they are generally affected by large swells, even when conditions are calm. Tiger sharks can be encountered here so care is needed whenever

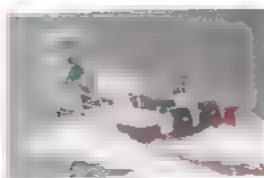
you dive. The types of dives available are classic reef formations, walls, pinnacles and coral gardens and the marine life is prolific. The diving at Mafia is linked to the tide and is limited to twice a day, simply because boats cannot reach the shore at low tide. Apart from that, you'll be given a feast of diving opportunities although the visibility can, at times, be quite poor.

The Dar es Salaam area is also very good. The reefs tend to be more of the fringing low-lying oceanic ones, but marine life is good and there are even a couple of wrecks to look at.



Water temp. °C

## Dive Centres



**Buccaneer Diving – Bruce and Jan Philips**  
Box 10394  
Mombasa, Kenya  
Tel / Fax: 00 254 11 487 372  
E-mail:  
[scuba@swiftnetmombasa.com](mailto:scuba@swiftnetmombasa.com)  
Buccaneer Diving is, at present, Kenya's only PADI Five Star DC centre offering Drift, Deep, Wall, Cavern, Reef and Night



**Fantasea Dive Club**  
PO Box 9, Dahab,  
South Sinai, Egypt  
Tel: 00 20 62 640043  
JK 01323 769193  
Fax: 00 20 62 640043  
JK 01323 769193  
E-mail: [fdc@intouch.com](mailto:fdc@intouch.com)  
E-mail UK:  
[fdcuk@globenet.co.uk](mailto:fdcuk@globenet.co.uk)  
PADI 5\* IDC  
All courses from Open Water to IDC, daily dive trips, safaris by jeep & camel, RIB boat trips, 16 page brochure available from our UK rep



**James & Mac Diving Centre,**  
Giftun Village, Hurghada,  
Red Sea, Egypt  
Tel: 0020 65  
442665/442667 or 8  
Fax: 0020 65 442300  
or 443203  
E-mail:  
[jamesmac@intouch.com](mailto:jamesmac@intouch.com)  
Homepage:  
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S Sinai, Egypt  
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Fax: 0020 62 640 321  
E-mail:  
[nesima@intouch.com](mailto:nesima@intouch.com)  
Hotel and diver centre offers complete dive holiday packages. All dive courses in PADI SSI & BSAC. Day trips and safaris.

**Oonas Dive Centre**  
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East Sussex BN12 2DG  
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Fax: 01323 738356  
We organise Egypt and Red Sea diving holidays from our dive centres, accommodation, liveaboards and safaris. We also offer full training

to Instructor and photo and marine workshops. We have expanded our dive operation to include Thailand and South Africa/Mosambique

**Pemba Diving Limited**  
PO Box 1475, Lkunda,  
Mombasa Kenya  
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Fax: 0020 62 600 144  
E-mail:  
[college@sinainet.com.eg](mailto:college@sinainet.com.eg)  
PADI. Diving courses from Open Water to DC in 5 Star training facility. Daily diving trips organised to Straights of Tiran and Ras Mohammed

**Shark's Bay Diving Club**  
PO Box 42, Sharm El Sheikh, South Sinai, Egypt  
Tel: 00 20 62 600942  
Fax: 00 20 62 600944  
E-mail:

[umbi@sinainet.com](mailto:umbi@sinainet.com)  
Web site:  
[www.diversguide.com/umbarak](http://www.diversguide.com/umbarak)  
PADI, SSI  
Shark's Bay are a complete resort with accommodation and diving facilities, starting from beginners courses up to liveaboard.

**Sinai Divers**  
Ghazala Hotel,  
Sharm el Sheikh,  
Egypt  
Tel: 00 20 62 600697  
Fax: 00 20 62 600158  
Web site:  
[www.sinadivers.com](http://www.sinadivers.com)  
PADI, SSI, CMAS  
Most experienced diver operation in Sinai for 25 years. Most complete services from Discover Scuba to instructor courses (SSI, PADI, CMAS). Daily diver operations with own dive boats and most luxurious liveaboards from Sinai to South of Egypt. We organise complete packages with transfer, hotels, diving, desert safaris, sightseeing, 3 locations Ghazala Hotel, Noama Bay, Conrad Resort and Baron Resort in Ras Rasran.

## Tour Operators

**DiveQuest**  
– 01254 826322

**Diving World**  
– 0171 407 0019

**Goldenjoy**  
– 0171 794 9767

**Hayes & Jarvis**  
– 0181 222 7840

**Oonas Divers**  
– 01323 648924

**Scubaway**  
– 01273 746261

**Sport Abroad**  
– 01306 714345

**Tony Backhurst**  
– 01483 271765

# Americas





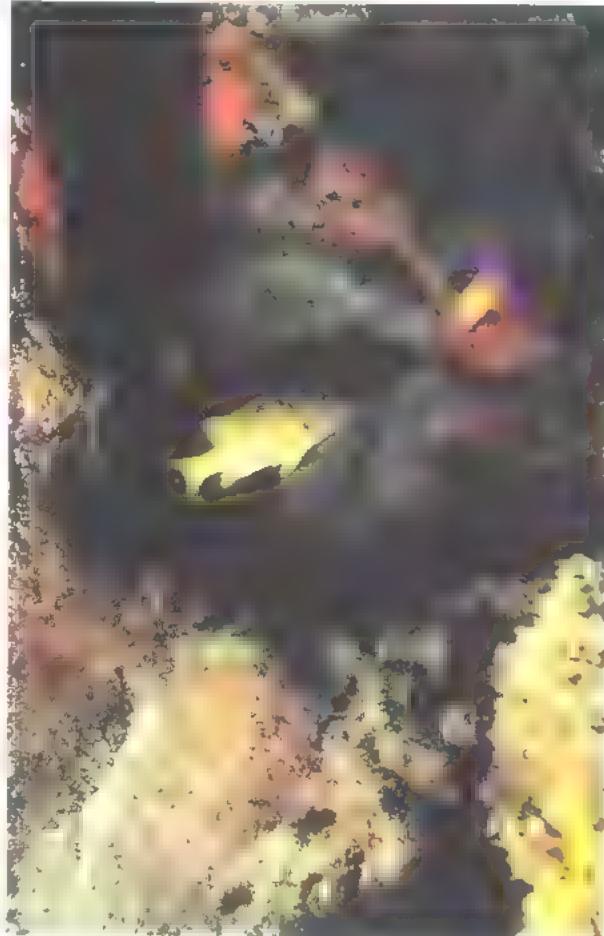
- |   |                   |    |                 |
|---|-------------------|----|-----------------|
| 1 | Ambergris Cay     | 10 | Lighthouse Reef |
| 2 | B. de Chetumal    | 11 | Glovers Reef    |
| 3 | Belize City       |    |                 |
| 4 | Turneffe Is.      |    |                 |
| 5 | Maya Mts          |    |                 |
| 6 | Dangriga          |    |                 |
| 7 | Monkey River      |    |                 |
| 8 | Golgo de Honduras |    |                 |
| 9 | Punta Gorda       |    |                 |



**How to get there** → Most travellers arrive in Belize from either Miami, Los Angeles, New Orleans or Houston. Aircraft land at Belize International airport, outside Belize City. Smaller airlines, operating single and twin engine 20 or so seaters will then take you on to your destination.

**Entry requirements** → A valid passport and return ticket are required, but no visa. When departing you have to pay a US\$10 tax.

**Climate** → Belize is a tropical country full of rainforest. It experiences two seasons – rainy and dry. During the wet season heavy rains can hamper travelling in-country, so the dry season (January to July) is the best time to visit. Hurricanes are possible from July to November.



**Inoculations required** → None in resort areas and on liveaboards, but check with your GP if you intend to travel in-country

**Language** → English is the official language, but in some parts Spanish and Creole are more common.

**Currency** → The Belizean dollar which is linked to the US\$ at a rate of BZ\$2 to US\$1.

**Tourist Authority** → Belize Tourist Board (Europe, Bopserwair Str. 406, D-70184 Tel 0049 711 233947

## The country

Belize was once under the control of Britain. It gained independence in 1973 and is still a member of the British Commonwealth. The country has had a



varied history which mainly involved the Brits spanking the Spanish, the Spanish spanking the Brits, the Mayans spanking everyone and finally the Brits spanking the Mayans and Spaniards into submission.

The country is now at peace and has one of the most environmentally conscious governments in the world. It is known as an eco-tourism giant.

The country itself is quite small, it covers only 8,866 square miles and is far from jam-packed, with a mere 200,000 inhabitants, most of them reside in Belize City. Rainforests dominate the scenery, although there are two mountain ranges in the south and grasslands in the south west.

Belize's biggest draw for divers is the Belize Barrier Reef, the second largest on the planet, beaten only by Australia's Great Barrier Reef, and three of the Caribbean's four coral atolls.

The reef stretches 185 miles south from the coast, from the Mexican town of Xcalak on the Yucatan Peninsula in the north, down almost the entire length of Belize. To the east of the reef, out in the Caribbean Sea, are the large atolls of Turneffe, Lighthouse Reef and Grovers Reef.

With such an incredible amount of coral on their front lawn, you can see why the Belizean government is so environmentally conscious. The reef and the associated atolls are bringing in a fortune in tourism dollars, much of it from divers.

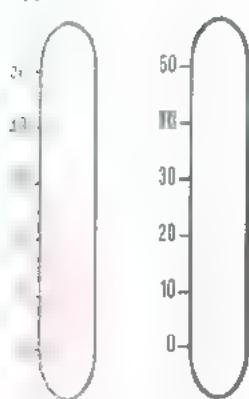
The reef and atolls are dotted with small islands, known as cayes, where the small local communities live and some tourist resorts have been set up.

But mass tourism is fairly new and the country is still very much in the developmental stage. The road system leaves a lot to be desired, but this adds to Belize's charm – you really feel you are back with nature, on nature's terms.

The ancient history of the country adds to the natural beauty. There are Mayan ruins dotted all through the forests and some, such as Altun Ha, are the vast remains of Mayan cities.

Belize really is an incredibly beautiful country with more to offer the travelling diver than just wonderfully preserved coral reefs.

Summer      Winter



Water temp. °C

## The diving

With the second largest barrier reef at your disposal and three huge atolls, there is plenty of choice for the diver. But Belize has been quite slow to open up to divers from the UK. Cora Cay Conservation, the non-profit environmental research organisation, has really done more to improve Belize's standing with UK divers than anything the country itself has done, which is a shame because why should the Americans get it all. CCC has carried out extensive reef monitoring and research projects on Turneffe Atoll and Lighthouse Reef, where its current activities are centred. Much of Turneffe and surrounding waters are now a national park, thanks to CCC's efforts and it is looking to build on that success with more multi-zone marine parks cited for the future.

Much of the traditional diving was on sites along the barrier reef or off Turneffe Atoll, but with the advent of several new liveaboards, the other atolls are also opening up. Lighthouse Reef for example has some excellent



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E-mail: ccc@coralcay.demon.co.uk  
ECC Trust (Charity No. 1025534)

# Belize

sites including a Blue Hole, which was made famous by Jacques-Yves Cousteau in his exploration expedition in 1972. The water inside the hole drops from a few metres to 145m – quite staggering. Inside you'll find ancient limestone columns formed by the fusing of stalagmites and stalactites thousands of years ago when the hole was a cave. Many lie at angles demonstrating an upheaval of the land in times past.

In general, the diving is dominated by the coral reef – there are few wrecks in Belize – which forms canyons, grottoes, caves, classic slopes and several spectacular walls.

Because the atolls and the reef sit out in the Caribbean, there are plenty of pelagic species for the diver to view. Mantas, whale sharks, wahoo, Spanish mackerel, sting ray and several shark species are all commonly seen. And one site along the barrier reef, Hell's Hole, often contains several sharks.

In addition to the big pelagics, Belize is well known for its large shoals of snappers, bountiful angelfish, large sponge formations, groupers and barracuda.

A site known as The Elbow, is often cited as the best Belize has to offer. It is located off Turneffe Atoll and is often subjected to strong currents, but that fact brings in the fish and the fish bring in the sharks, and on occasion pilot whales and orcas.

At present the most exciting area for diving is Glover's Reef. It only has one resort and is only visited by the largest liveaboards. It is the most exposed and can be tricky to navigate in bad weather. Yet what divers are treated to are pristine and spectacular coral stacks. The visibility isn't often as good as other areas in Belize, but the life is incredible.

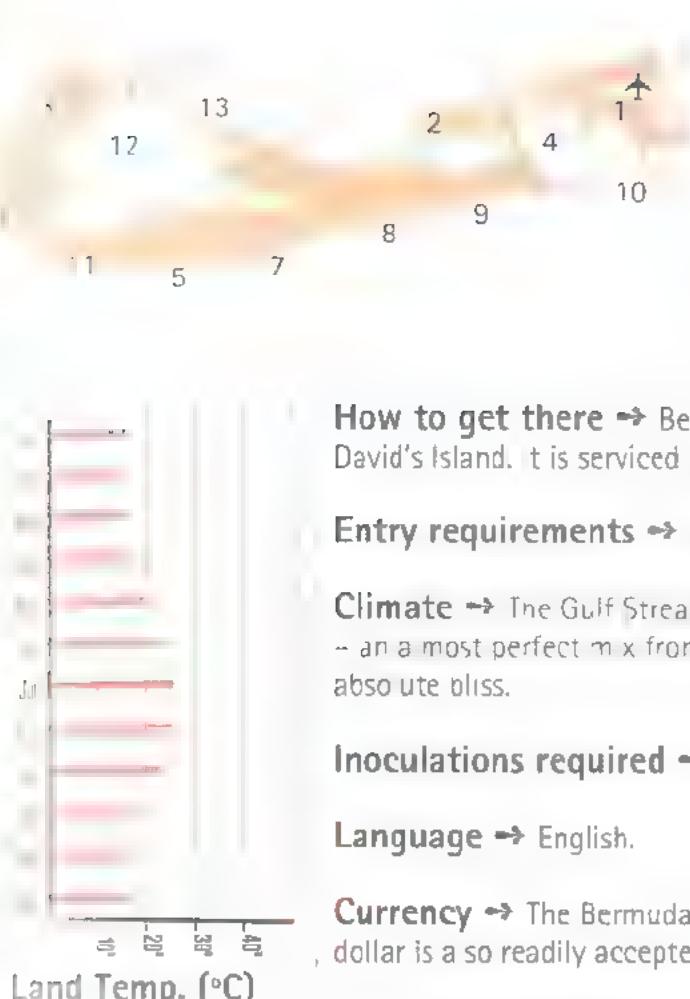


PO Box 79, San Pedro, Belize  
Tel: 011-501-26-2778 Fax: 011-501-26-2784  
email: mayanprin@btl.net  
[www.ambergriscaye.com/mayanprin](http://www.ambergriscaye.com/mayanprin)

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As you can see, Belize has so much to offer the diver, including that get-away-from-it-all ambience. What it lacks is wrecks. There's one on Lighthouse reef and several on Banco Chinchorro, an atoll further up just inside Mexican waters, but generally Belize is lacking.

However, the latest word is that the Belizean government is seriously looking at sinking one or more artificial wrecks, which in a few years will make a pretty diversion. If you want more information check out the *Diving and Snorkelling Guide to Belize* by Ned Middleton.



- 1 St David's Island
- 2 Shelley Bay Beach
- 3 Ely's Harbour
- 4 Castle Harbour
- 5 Horseshoe Bay
- 6 West Whale Bay
- 7 Elbow Beach
- 8 Devonshire Bay
- 9 John Smith's Bay
- 10 Nonsuch Island
- 11 Church Bay
- 12 Great Sound
- 13 Cobbler's Island

**How to get there** → Bermuda's airport is located at St George's on St David's Island. It is serviced by several airlines direct from the UK.

**Entry requirements** → A passport and a valid onward or return ticket.

**Climate** → The Gulf Stream keeps Bermuda mild and humid all year round – an almost perfect mix from 18°C in the Winter rising to 30°C in Summer – absolute bliss.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → English.

**Currency** → The Bermuda dollar is the official legal tender, but the US dollar is also readily accepted.

**Tourist Authority** → Bermuda Tourism, 1 Battersea Church Road, London SW11 3LY. Tel 0171 771 7001.

## The country

Bermuda, a nation often thought to lie in the Caribbean, is actually located much further north in the Atlantic Ocean and is a collection of some 150 islands – a mere 20 of which are inhabited. The largest is shaped like a fish hook and surrounded by the many other smaller islands.

Bermuda is the oldest surviving British Crown Colony and seems to be quite proud of the fact. It is easy to see the island's colonial roots in its architecture, the use of the roads (they too drive on the right) and even the local police uniform.

As nations go, Bermuda is one of the smallest, being only 22 square miles in area. It is divided into



# Bermuda

nine Parishes and its capital, Hamilton, is located about halfway down the main island.

Bermuda is actually way outside the tropical zone, but it is washed by warm Gulf Stream currents that give a sub-tropical climate and a lush carpet of vegetation all year around.

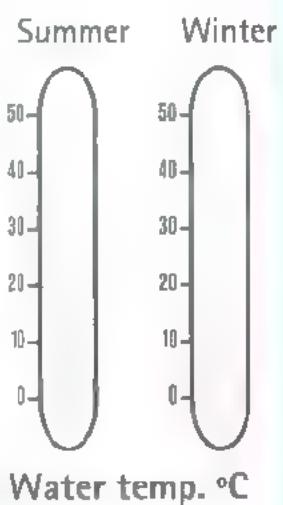
Bermuda is famed for its fabled triangle and, while many strange stories have come out of the region, the tourist trade has lapped them up and revelled in the hype. Bermuda has not been a favourite dive destination possibly because the island has a reputation being expensive. And yes, there are some very exclusive hotels and restaurants, but there are also some inexpensive guest houses, cafes and bars.

## The diving

Bermuda waters boast the most northerly coral reefs in the world thanks to the hardiness of the species found here and the warm Gulf Stream. There is plenty to keep the diver interested, including some spectacular reef formations, a high concentration of interesting wrecks and a number of ancient wooden sailing shipwreck sites.

The diving has benefited from the lack of diver interest in the past and a very good ecological stance by the government. The coral is largely untouched and pristine. And the fish life around the islands had a boost when the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries banned fishermen using fish pots. The outcome was that many fish species that had been caught accidentally started to thrive. The fish numbers on the reefs have dramatically increased, which is great news for divers.

The reefs and wrecks are aggressively protected, too. A coral awareness programme was initiated to educate both locals and visitors in the fragility



of the reef systems around the island and this culminated in the opening of the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute, which educates visitors and conducts research on the surrounding marine ecosystem.

Wrecks are protected by law and anyone caught taking anything off a wreck, no matter how small, will be prosecuted.

Many wrecks are broken up by the sometimes violent storms that attack the island, but there are so many to choose from that the diver is often overwhelmed. The wrecks range from wooden sailing ships to passenger liners. Some of the most easily visited include the *Constellation*, the wreck that prompted Peter Benchley to write the 1970s film and book *The Deep*; the *Marine Celestia*, a Confederate warship; and the *Cristof Colon*, Bermuda's largest wreck.

The newest wreck was deliberately laid last year. Called the *Xang Da*, it was a Chinese ship bringing illegal immigrants to the US, but it broke down near to Bermuda. The ship was towed in and impounded. Instead of scrapping her it was decided to sink her as a tourist attraction. She has only been down a few months and still looks new, but in a few years she will flourish and she is in a perfect diving location.

There are several good and well established dive operators around the islands offering both PADI and BSAC training as well as guided dive packages and there is also a BSAC dive club which BSAC members can contact for help.



# Brazil

- |                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1 C. Orange       | 12 São Paulo      |
| 2 Ilha de Marajó  | 13 Porto Alegre   |
| 3 Belém           | 13 Belo Horizonte |
| 4 São Luis        |                   |
| 5 Fortaleza       |                   |
| 6 Natal           |                   |
| 7 Recife          |                   |
| 8 Maceió          |                   |
| 9 Salvador        |                   |
| 10 Campos         |                   |
| 11 Rio de Janeiro |                   |



**How to get there** → At present only a handful of tour companies offer Brazil in their packages, although, after reading this, there may well be more. You will have to go it alone and make the arrangements yourself. Flights from the UK land at Rio de Janeiro and the rest of the country can be accessed from there.

**Entry requirements** → Passport with at least six months still to run.

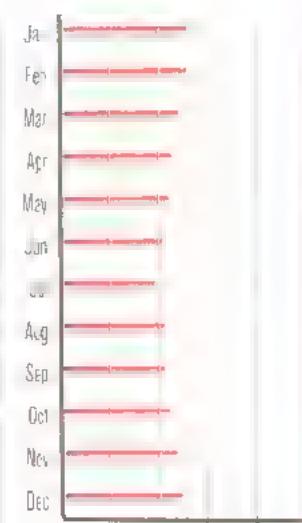
**Climate** → The northern reaches of Brazil offer year-round tropical conditions. Rio is actually on the edge of the tropics and temperatures do drop slightly in winter (which is our summer).

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → A customised Portuguese, although English is widely spoken.

**Currency** → The rea

**Tourist Authority** → Brazilian Embassy, 32 Green Street, London W1Y 4AT. Tel 0171 499 0877

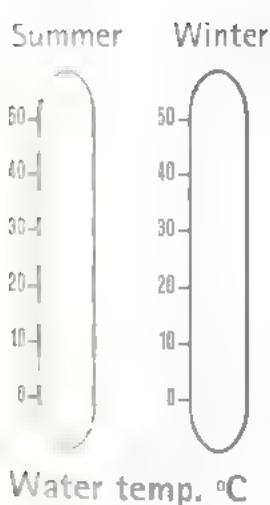


## The country

Brazil is the world's fifth largest country and occupies about half of South America. Much of the country is still rainforest, although year after year much of this ancient forest is being destroyed. The environmental struggle to save the rainforest is centred here.

Brazil is a lively place. The population is a broad mix of Portuguese, Africans and native Indians, as well as settlers from other nations. It is seen as a country for revellers partly because of the massive Carnival, which begins at midnight on the Friday before Ash Wednesday and lasts for five days. Although Rio hogs the lime light, the entire country celebrates too.

For the rest of the year Brazil's rich laze about in not a lot on its crowded beaches, while the very poor live in squalor in shanty towns.



## The diving

Although there is diving to be had all along the coast, there is really only one place where even Brazilian divers long to dive. Not that all the other sites are no good – far from it – but the island of Fernando de Noronha (or Loronha) is so special that everything else pales by comparison.

Fernando de Noronha is one of the most protected places on earth and for good reason. It is home to the oldest and largest pod of dolphins on the planet and a stock of marine life that would make fishermen the world over squirm in their galoshes.

The park covers about 70 per cent of the island and surrounding waters and is controlled by the Brazilian Environmental Institute (IBAMA).

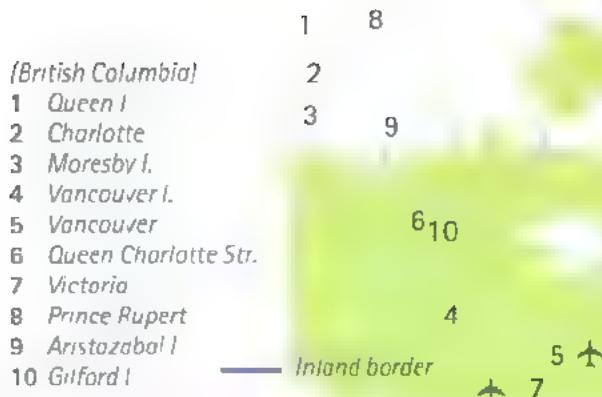
Only 420 tourists are allowed on the island at a time and there are only 2000 permanent residents. Development is forbidden, fishing is almost forbidden and any house refurbishment must be carried out only after permission is granted from IBAMA. It all sounds tough, and it is, but all these restrictions, which have been in place since 1988, mean that the marine life is in full riot. Fish are everywhere, turtles are doing well and sharks are incredible.

One dive site called Laje dos Dois Irmaos is a nursery for grey reef sharks.

But it is the dolphins that steal the show and it is the dolphins that are the reason for the marine park. The pod of 700 or so spinner dolphins spends the day inside a sheltered bay on the north side of the island, but at about 2-3pm it heads out to feed, returning early the next day.

If you are on a boat in front of the bay mouth at that time (no boats are allowed in the bay) and you are equipped with snorkelling gear, you will be in for a treat that will stay embedded in your mind forever.

# Canada



**How to get there** → There are various international airports in Canada, but if you want to get to the best diving, then you really want to head for Victoria on Vancouver Island for the wonders of British Columbia. Various airlines fly here including Air Canada, British Airways and American Airlines.

**Entry requirements** → British citizens do not need a visa, just a passport and onward or return ticket

**Climate** → British Columbia experiences four distinct seasons, the classic winter, spring, summer and autumn (although they call it fall). The region has the most temperate climate of all the Canadian areas, thanks mainly to the warm Pacific Ocean airstreams. Snow doesn't often fall on low lying areas in winter and the summers are warm and pretty dry – very similar to the UK really.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Canadian English and French (and don't confuse the Canadian accent for American)

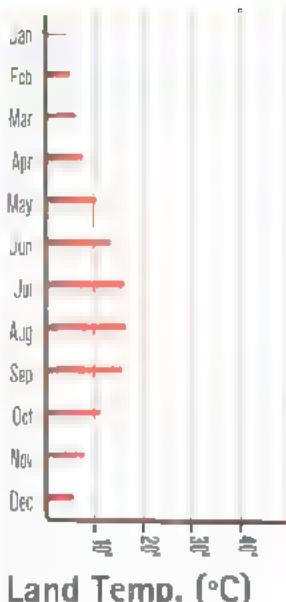
**Currency** → Canadian dollar

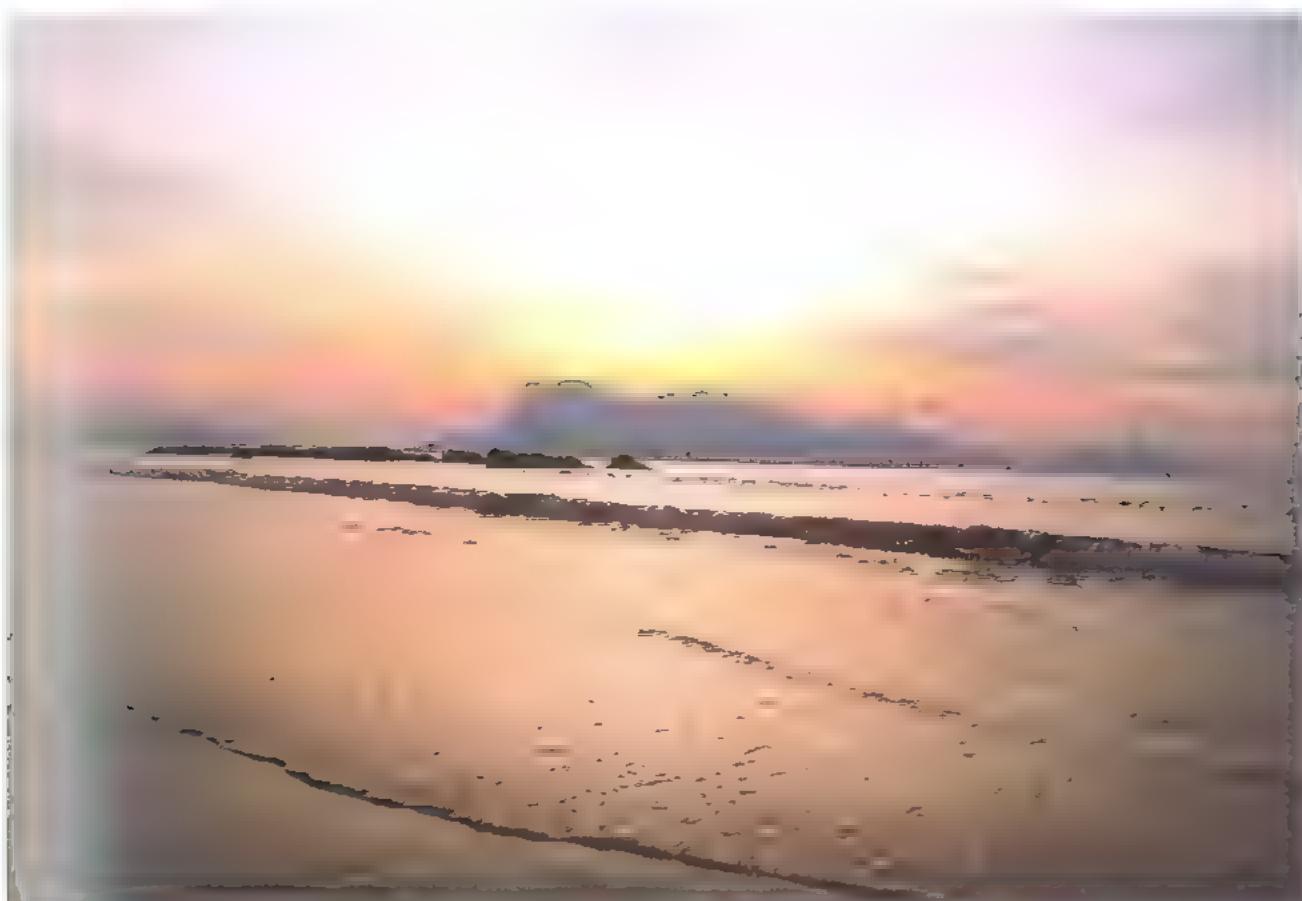
**Tourist Authority** → Tourism British Columbia 1-3 Regent Street, London SW1Y 4NS. Tel 0171 930 6857.

## The country

Canada, the world's second largest country, has 10 provinces and two territories – British Columbia is just one and the most westerly. The country's capital is Ottawa in Ontario province. British Columbia's provincial capital is Victoria on Vancouver Island. Funnily enough Vancouver City isn't on Vancouver Island at all, but on the mainland opposite.

British Columbia can only be

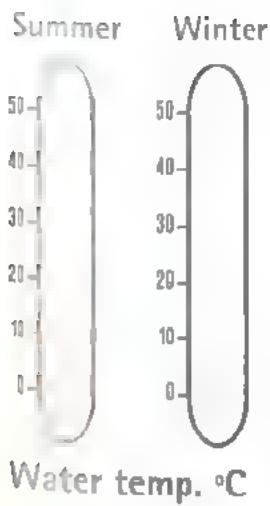




described as amazingly beautiful. It is a collection of lushly pine-forested mountains, picturesque bays and wildlife to make your mouth drop. Eagles, deer, moose, killer whales and humpback whales are all seen here. Outdoor pursuits are, not surprisingly, big and include: hiking, cycling, skiing (at the right time of year), diving, sea kayaking and many more are incredibly popular.

One of the biggest centres for diving in British Columbia is the town of Nanaimo. It is nestled within the Vancouver Is and pine forests and is big on outdoor pursuits of which diving is only one.

The Vancouver Strait between the mainland and Vancouver Island is one of the best places in the world for sighting killer whales and is therefore a big centre for sailing and sea kayaking. The water is clear and calm although at its opening the current can be a little fierce at times.



## The diving

The diving in British Columbia is very similar to diving in Scotland, only the life is so much bigger and so much denser. All the rock faces are completely covered in huge anemones, algaes and soft corals. There's an incredible array of life including the ugly and huge woolly feels, rare sharks and even giant octopus. The reason for all this wealth of life is the nutrient rich waters, but this does have its down side. When the waters warm in the summer algal blooms commonly reduce the visibility to about a metre on the surface.

The currents here can also be strong simply because the whole Pacific Ocean wants to squeeze through the Strait creating currents of up to 10 and even 20 knots! This makes diving hazardous at times and very tide dependent, so careful planning is required. Thankfully some of the bays and sounds are

# Canada

*Another wreck goes down in Nanimo British Columbia*



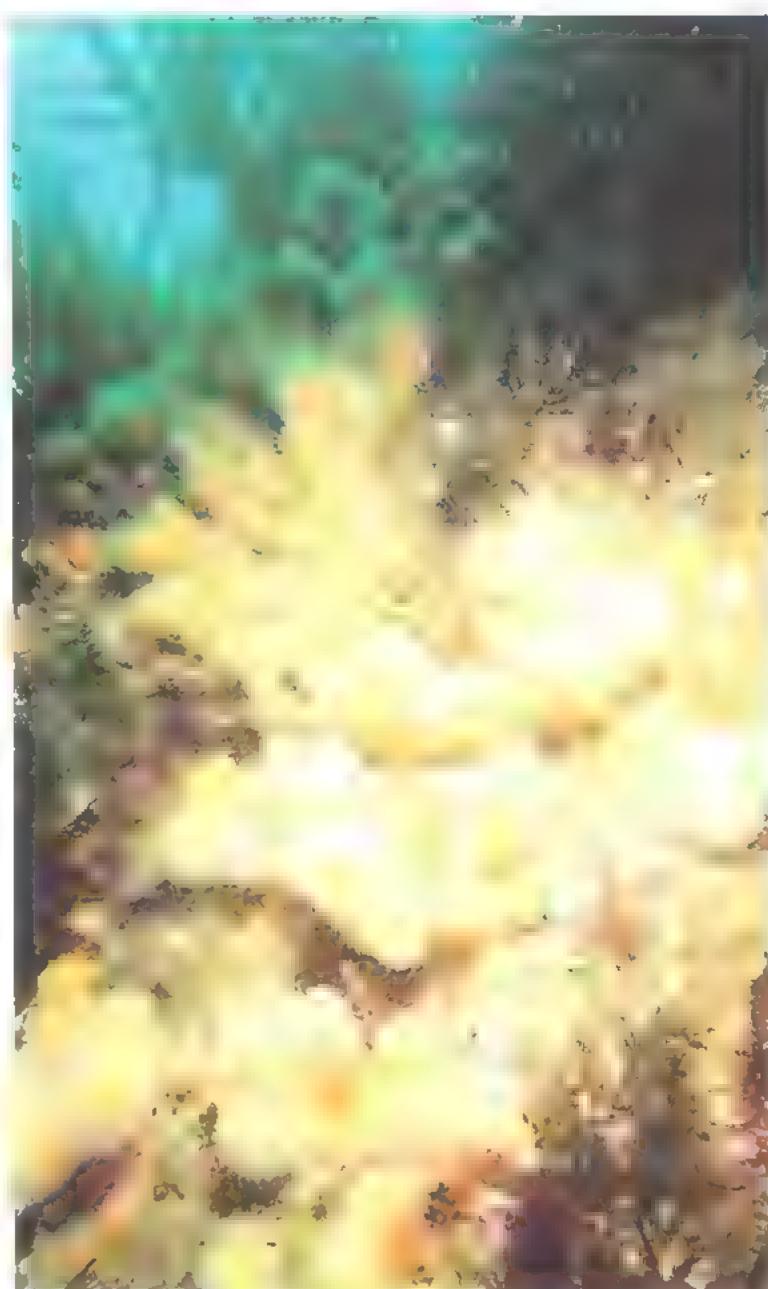
current free and are diveable at any time.

Diving attractions include large wolf eels, the odd killer whale sighting and the chance to see giant Pacific octopus, which can grow to a massive four metres arm span.

A spectacle that has kept scientists guessing also makes an appearance at certain times of the year. The rare and secretive six-gilled shark, which is usually found in deep water, swims into shallow sites and can be seen by divers – something not possible anywhere else in the world.

As well as the natural wonders of the region, BC also has a number of interesting wrecks, some of which are newer than others because the BC diving industry, with local government and businesses, initiated an artificial reef programme. The aim was to sink nine ex-Canadian Navy vessels all over the region. To date there five have been sunk, simply because of the logistics involved in sinking a destroyer, but as the local dive industries raise more money more vessels will be sunk.

Diving conditions in BC vary as they do in the UK. In summer the water is quite pleasant, and in winter it can be quite cold. However the winter is very often the best time to dive because of the better visibility. Dry suits are certainly the order of the day though.



**Michael**

Michael Patrick Wong  
Underwater photographer  
and author of the book  
*Underwater Photography*  
Michael Patrick Wong

Michael Patrick Wong  
Underwater Photographer  
and Author of the book  
*Underwater Photography*

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# Costa Rica



**How to get there** → There are a few flights, mainly charters, from Europe, but most fly into Costa Rica from the US. All international flights land at the capital, San José. Connections to other parts of the country can be found at the domestic terminal here.

**Entry requirements** → A full passport is required.

**Climate** → The Pacific coastal regions experience a high level of rainfall. There are recognised seasons – wet and dry, but the dry isn't always completely dry. The worst rain occurs from September to the beginning of November.

**Inoculations required** → None, if you are staying in a resort area.

**Language** → Spanish is the official language, but English is widely spoken.

**Currency** → Costa Rican colón

**Tourist Authority** → Costa Rican Embassy, Flat 1, 14 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3LH. Tel 0171 706 8844.

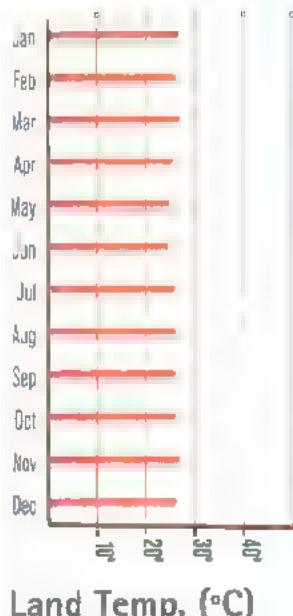
## The country

Some say Costa Rica has everything man could wish for – tropical rainforests oozing life, the rich warm coral seas of the Caribbean, the nutrient-rich waters of the Pacific, a climate to die for and some of the world's best dive sites, white water rafting rivers, mountain bike trails and walks.

The country itself is about 51,200 sq kilometres of rainforests, farms, clean cities, towns and villages supporting a population of about 3,500,000 people. The majority of these are Roman Catholic. Costa Rica has no army or navy, nor any major crime and its government is extremely proud of being democratic. It deserves its nickname – the Switzerland of central America. The population benefits from the highest standard of living in central America and is both well-educated and friendly.

As for the geography of the country, a mountain range splits it centrally in two. To the east is the Caribbean Sea and to the west is the Pacific Ocean. In between, the land is covered in dense mountainous rain forest, only levelling out in the large coastal planes.

Costa Rica is considered to be one of the eco-tourism capitals of the world, but should also be considered the adventure capital to boot. White water rafting, kayaking, mountain-biking, volcano tours and hiking are only a few of the activities on offer to visitors. Scuba diving is also one of the



fastest growing tourist markets, with the greatest growth being seen on the Pacific side as more and more divers look for something a little more exciting.



## The diving

If excitement is your thing, then Costa Rica is the right place to be. The Pacific coastal waters offer all manner of experiences and all with a generous fish backdrop at virtually every dive site.

The nutrient-rich waters are the reason for the abundance of fish life and divers often get the chance to see whale sharks, mantas, several species of sharks and even pilot whales. When divers talk of Costa Rica the stories normally include apex predators. There is very little coral in Costa Rican Pacific waters, but even if there was you wouldn't see much of it as you are too busy looking at the sharks in front of you and too busy worrying about the ones behind. There are sharks and other big pelagics everywhere. Gangs of bull sharks abound off the Guanacaste region, white-tips swarm over the volcanic backdrop of the Osa Peninsula and the offshore Island of Cocos is one of the few places on the planet where hammerhead shoals are encountered.

The Guanacaste region in the north west is the centre of Costa Rica's mainland Pacific diving market. From here divers can either visit the near-shore reefs, which are around a 10 to 20 minute boat ride away or venture out to the Bat Islands, the Catalinas, or any number of offshore sea mounts to encounter the big stuff.

The Osa Peninsula is in the southern reaches of the country and sticks way out in to the Pacific catching virtually everything that passes by. There is a dive centre here, but don't expect it to be crowded, even during the high season as it is an expedition just getting there.

Cocos Island lies about 250 miles out from Puntarenas and is classified as a national park. At the moment only three liveaboards are making the long journey out to the island where various scenes from the Hollywood blockbuster Jurassic Park were filmed. The island is plagued by bad weather from time to time, but divers privileged enough to make the journey know that the experience is well worth it.

Costa Rica's 130 mile stretch of Caribbean coast is very much uncharted. The diving operators and hotels here have been overshadowed by the Pacific coast development and, as such, have virgin reefs simply awaiting discovery.



# Galapagos



- |              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| 1 Esmeraldas | 11 Galapagos Is.    |
| 2 Manta      | 12 Fernandina I.    |
| 3 Bahia de   | 13 sabela I.        |
| Caraquez     | 14 Santa Maria I.   |
| 4 Salinas    | 15 Espanola I.      |
| 5 Machala    | 16 San Cristobal I. |
| 6 Isla Pund  | 17 Santa Cruz I.    |
| 7 Jipijapa   | 18 San Salvador I.  |
| 8 Quito      | 19 Marchena I.      |
| 9 Riobamba   |                     |
| 10 Loja      |                     |



Inland border



**How to get there** → The Galapagos Islands are a part of Ecuador and are accessed through Quito Airport. Carriers include KLM, Air France and Iberia, all of which fly from London. There are daily flights from Quito to San Cristobal in the Galapagos.

**Entry requirements** → You need a full passport and an onward or return ticket. There is a National Park tax which must be paid on arrival (or it may be included in your holiday package - check with your agent). A departure tax is also levied.

**Climate** → The Galapagos archipelago straddles the Equator and the climate is generally hot. The sea, on the other hand, is changeable. Several oceanic currents mix here and some are not very warm at all.

**Inoculations required** → None (if you are on a boat)

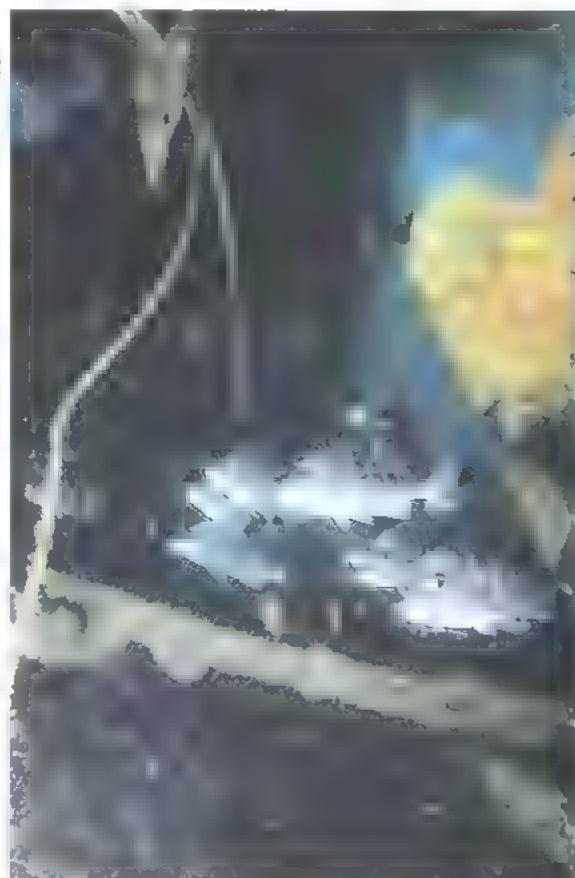
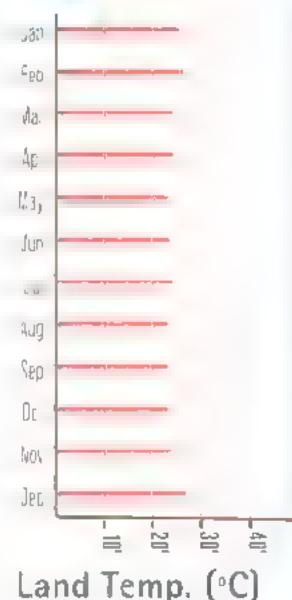
**Language** → Spanish is the first language of Ecuador, but the US is only a couple of hours away and English is widely spoken.

**Currency** → The local legal tender is the sucre, but the US\$ is widely accepted, especially on Galapagos cruises.

**Tourist Authority** → None in UK

## The country

The Galapagos archipelago is a collection of 48 volcanic islands about 600 miles off the Pacific Ocean off the west coast of Ecuador, Central America. As well as the main islands, there are numerous rock pinnacles that push their way through the surface, but are too small to be inhabited. The Ecuadorian government had placed some conservation measures on the islands and had declared its waters a marine park, but lack of funds and care made a mockery of the system and up until very recently no-one apart from conservationists seemed to be bothered that the Galapagos Islands' economy and environment was heading down the pan. However, this year the Ecuadorian President has initiated some sweeping and tough new conservation laws to help protect the island's fragile ecosystem. The protection zone will extend from 15 miles to 40 miles around the



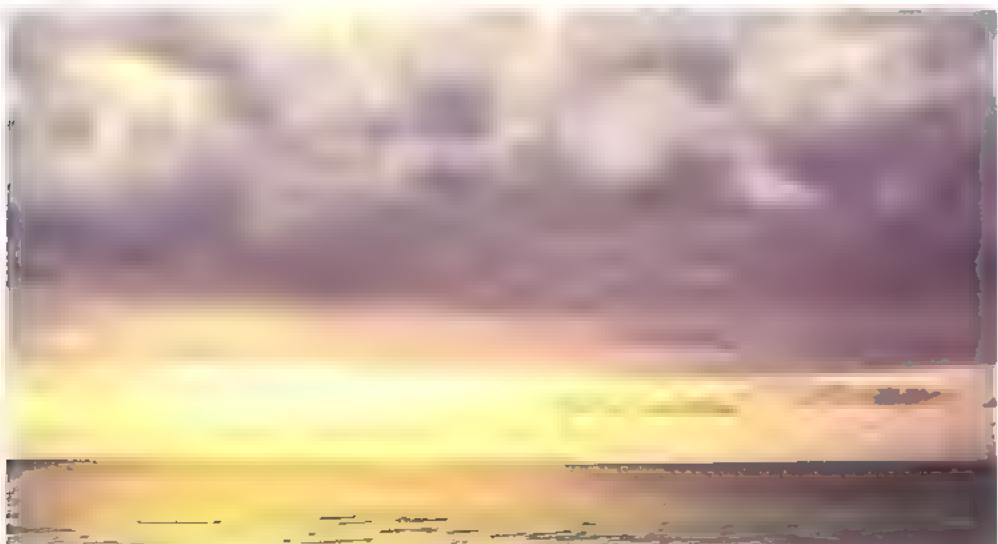
island, no industrial fishing will be allowed to take place within this zone. Quarantine laws will be stepped up preventing alien species from disrupting the natural creatures and 50% of tourist money will go to support the Islands conservation. These reforms were not well liked by various parties with interests in plundering the resources of the Galapagos, but should help stabilise the delicate ecosystem and strengthen the national park laws that were introduced in 1985. However, past conservation measures have not just been ignored they have been over-turned. The Galapagos Islands look, on paper, like one of the most protected places on earth. In reality, the fisheries – both national and international – have the islands by the throat and will not let go until they are dead. The industry has a strong presence here, much more than any governmental law. This is a tragedy as the shark population is now down by 50% of what it was in the late 1980s, grouper are in decline, seahorses, pipefish and urchins are being decimated and attacks and killings of sealions, tortoises and turtles are increasing. And that's not all because a fish processing plant has been built on San Cristobal and another is planned for Isabela. The situation is operated like a mafia-ring and kept secreted away from the growing tourist market, which soon, conservationists say, will be seeing 'dead areas'.

The problem is funding: the fishermen are making vast amounts of money selling to the oriental market that doesn't care where its fish produce comes from, as long as it comes: but the government has no funds to police the park. Its few patrol boats, several donated by the US, lie dormant because of lack of funds to fill them with fuel!

The new laws have been publicly welcomed by conservation organisations, but many are far from optimistic.

Charles Darwin made this collection of small islands famous in 1845 when he spent five weeks here studying the natural inhabitants and he, like the millions of others who have followed his footsteps, was amazed at how seemingly unafraid the creatures were. In the 150 or so years since Darwin studied the Galapagos little has changed, except perhaps for the number of visitors, although the number of tourists allowed per year is heavily restricted. Yet its creatures still have not learned to fear man.

The park rules for tourists are strongly enforced and each shore party is accompanied by a guide. There are set paths to follow and anyone straying from them will be in trouble as will anyone seen feeding, touching or



# Galapagos



generally scaring animals.

Many of the creatures here are found nowhere else on the planet. This is what excited Darwin and the rest of the scientific world. While here, you really have to go ashore to see the giant tortoises, iguanas, sealions, Galapagos penguins, sea birds and a host of other creatures.

Quito, back on the mainland, was the capital of the Inca empire and a few days here before travelling on to the Galapagos is well worthwhile.

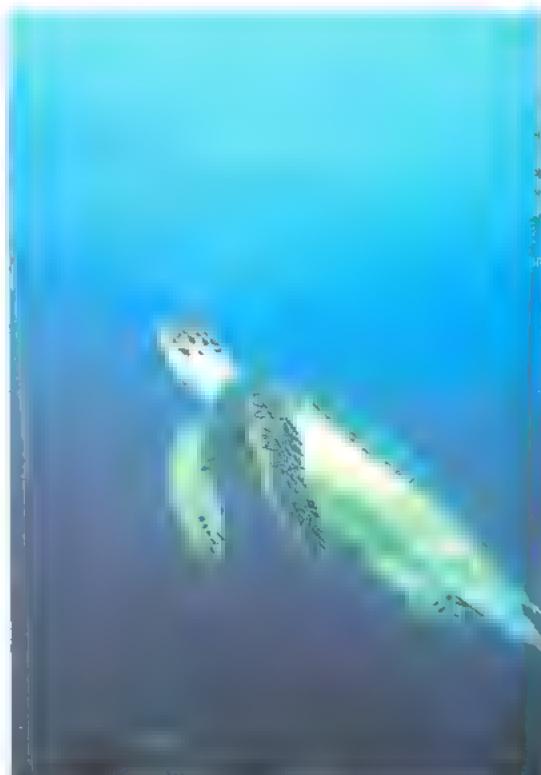
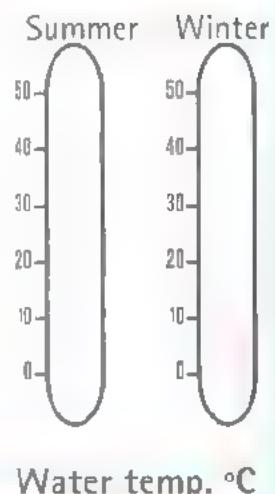
The most common way to see the Galapagos Islands is by boat. There are hundreds of charter vessels operating within the waters. Some are just for tours taking guests from island to island, others offer diving and some are dedicated liveaboard dive boats.

## The diving

Although the islands lie on the Equator, the water temperature is surprisingly cool in places because a number of oceanic currents meet around the Galapagos. Some are warm, others are cold and that gives divers the opportunity to dive with Galapagos penguins on one dive and tropical reef fish on the next. The range in temperatures can be dramatic and often catches new divers out. Other special creatures on the Galapagos are hammerhead sharks, Galapagos sharks, manta rays and whale sharks.

The sealions are good fun and will play with divers endlessly. No diver can say they are bored when diving with sharks and certainly no one can tire of these islands and their waters. However, the environmental concerns are putting a taint on the diving and eco tours. When divers first started to visit the islands in the 1970s there were fish, sharks, whales and dolphins everywhere. Divers were 'blown away' by the abundance of life. These days that feeling isn't as full in the face. Yes, the Galapagos are still great, but for how long? Without better policing the delicate balance that keeps the Galapagos so special will disappear.

British divers are quite well catered for when it comes to diving the Galapagos. There are several agents in the UK that can give advice, take bookings on boats and make the flight arrangements.



- 1 Kauai
- 2 Oahu
- 3 Molokai
- 4 Maui
- 5 Hawaii

**How to get there** → Hawaii is accessed via America. Virtually every major US airport has connections to Hawaii and carriers include American Airlines, United, Hawaiian Airlines and Continental.

| **Entry requirements** → As for the US.

**Climate** → Hawaii's climate is tropical, although the temperature is cooler in the mountains. There is a fluctuation in rainfall, with the winter receiving the most. However, the windward side of the islands experiences rain almost every day.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → English

**Currency** → US dollar

**Tourist Authority**

→ American Tourist Authority, 5 Upper Grosvenor Street, London W1A 1AE. Tel 0171 499 9000.

## The country

Hawaii is not one island at all, but a chain, which holds a couple of impressive world records. It is the most isolated archipelago – some 2500 miles from the nearest land mass – on the planet and the Big Island has the world's most active volcano – Kilauea. With statistics like that it is little wonder that the Hawaii chain



# Hawaii

has had so much attention over the years. Other islands in the chain include Maui, Lana'i, O'ahu and Molokai.

The Hawaiian Islands are a part of the United States but the Japanese are buying up much of the property on the islands at the moment.

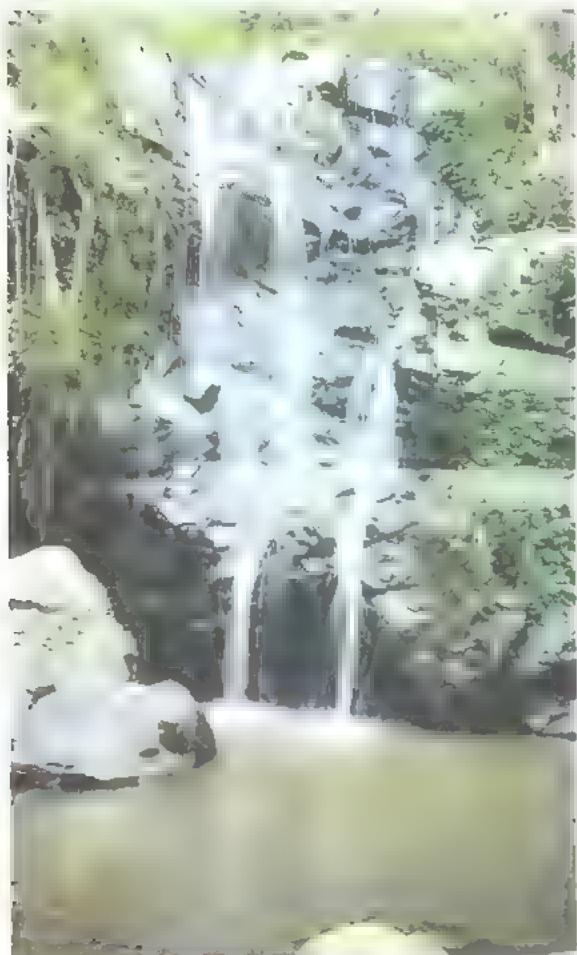
Hawaii hit the world stage on 7 December 1941 when the Japanese bombed the Naval base at Pearl Harbour and forced the United States into the Second World War.

These days Hawaii is better known for its surfing, hula dancing and generally friendly ambience. Yet the Big Island and its smaller brothers have a lot more to offer than dudes with boards and girls in Ti leaf skirts.

The volcanic scenery is simply spectacular and has created lushly forested mountains, awe-inspiring waterfalls and desolate wastelands. The scenery is most dramatically seen from above and there are several helicopter charter companies that, for a fee, will give you an adrenaline-pumping look at the island's beauty.

However, the beauty doesn't stop at the water's edge. Hawaiian islands are a stop-over for migrating humpback whales in winter until about late April/early May. They have paused here on their long journeys in the Pacific for centuries. The new high rise hotels and bustling communities on the islands have not caused them to alter their course and from some hotel rooms with a sea view they can be seen breaching out at sea. In fact sometimes they get so close you can watch them from the beach.

Alternatively, you can take a special whale-watching boat trip to get really up close and personal.

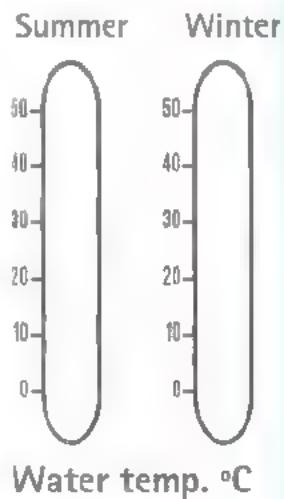


## The diving

The Hawaiian chain is a bit of an unsung wonder. The Japanese know about it, as do the Americans, but because of their distance from Europe, the Brits have not made the journey, which is a shame. Hawaii has some amazing underwater scenery, which has made it the most visited Pacific dive destination.

Kauai, Oahu, Maui County (including Lanai and Molokai), and Hawaii are the main islands used by divers as they have the best sites and dive centres.

Being volcanic, the bottom topography is a collection of underwater caves, lava tubes and canyons which go well with the classic reef formations. The reefs around Hawaii (the youngest island) aren't very old, simply because of the volcanic action in





the area, but most are brimming with coral and fish.

Because the islands are just small blips in the massive Pacific Ocean, Hawaii is visited by many pelagic species including large green turtles, sharks and even dolphins.

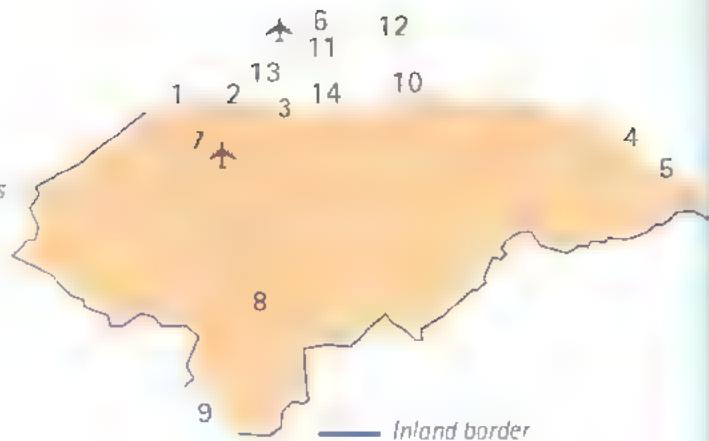
Most of the dive operations have been established for years and cater for – even pamper – US and Japanese divers. The operations are slick, friendly and altogether well run. Dives are reached from either the shore or by boat and offer a variety of experiences. Wrecks are quite common in these waters and the drop offs can be amazing.

Maui is renowned for its shore diving, which has sites such as Nahuna Point which blends into Turtle Town where green turtles are often seen. Makaha Caves, off Oahu, is an ideal site for beginners, as it is quite shallow and sheltered. It is made up of volcanic formations and is an ideal place for reef fish spotting.

The number of dive sites around all of the Hawaiian islands, mixed with plentiful dive centres, a good range of accommodation and a climate to die for, give the recipe for a great dive trip.

# Honduras

- 1 Puerto Cortés
- 2 Tela
- 3 La Ceiba
- 4 Laguna
- 5 Coratasca
- 6 Bay Islands
- 7 San Pedro Sula
- 8 Tegucigalpa
- 9 Golfo de Fonseca
- 10 Puerto Castilla
- 11 Roatán
- 12 Guanaja
- 13 Utila
- 14 Cayos Cochinos



**How to get there** → With a country so underdeveloped, getting to and around Honduras is not easy. Ask any LS tourist who has been stranded in one part of the country unable to reach their destination or even return home. Roatan now has a metalled runway and is serviced by a few airlines. To get to mainland Honduras you first have to fly into another international airport such as Miami and then connect to Pedro Sula or Roatan. That is the easy part.

**Entry requirements** → You need a full passport and an onward or return air ticket.

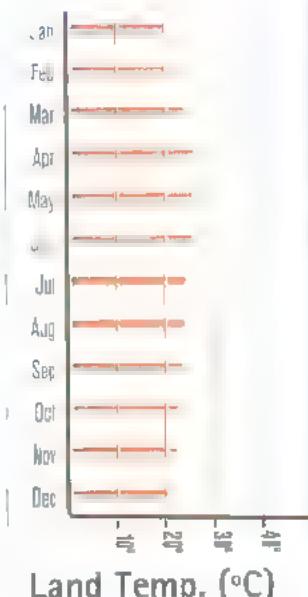
**Climate** → The Caribbean islands of Honduras are tropical and sun drenched. The summer is the calmest season and therefore the best time to dive the islands.

**Inoculations required** → Cholera, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, malaria and take plenty of insect repellent.

**Language** → Spanish, but English is widely spoken.

**Currency** → The lempira

**Tourist Authority** → None



## The country

The main dive destination in Honduras are the Bay Islands, which are situated 40 miles off the coast and are basically remnants of old volcanoes.

Roatan is the main gateway for diving the Bay and Hog Islands, but it is primitive. The island does have a metalled landing strip and international jets from the States land, and until a few years ago that was about it. For, although Roatan is the most popular island, it is still very underdeveloped compared to most other Caribbean islands. However, in recent years, the tourist industry has started to flourish and Roatan, because of its airport, has seen the largest growth and is now home to several modern resorts.

The island is about 33 miles long, only four miles wide and is covered in dense jungle. Most of the population – about 12 000 – live along the coastline because the interior is just too steep.

The local Roatans are descendants of European buccaneers and are generally fair skinned.



Guanaja is similar, but less developed than its larger neighbour. It is almost a mile long and nearly three miles wide and has just three villages – Bonacca, Savanne Bight and Mangrove Bight. As on Roatan, the structures cling precariously to the steep rocky shoreline.

## The diving

The most famous dives in Honduras lie on the larger Caribbean coastline. The Pacific coast is very limited and diving operations are fairly unknown. On the Caribbean side you have the Bay Islands of Roatan, Guanaja and Utila, which make up the majority of Honduras' diving business.

There are a number of diving opportunities throughout the Bay Islands from the more tourist-gearred Roatan to the lesser known Guanaja and down to the almost unheard of Cayos Cochinos (or Hog Islands).

The largest and most visited is Roatan. Here the diver finds walls, caves, wrecks and even an earthquake crack, a huge crack in an otherwise fine wall. The site is named Calvin's Crack.

The crack starts with a hole at about 9m and extends into the rock face offering a passageway about three to four metres wide. The walls are lined with soft corals and sea fans. From the end of the crack the scene looking back is most impressive.

Other dives around Roatan include a number of classic deep Caribbean walls and several shallower ones. Because of the overall geography of the islands, most of the sites are walls of some sort. The benthic life consists of hard stoney corals as seen throughout the Caribbean and many large sponges. Fish life is generally good, but seasonal, so it is best to avoid the rainy season.

Guanaja has a number of sites, 28 of which are named and buoyed and form the majority of the dives visitors explore. Dives here range from scenic reefs to wrecks and on to canyons and tunnels. The bottom topography is very interesting and the fish life is often amazing.

If Roatan is undeveloped and Guanaja is even more so, then the Hog Islands are positively deserted – well almost. Diving facilities are very rare here, but they are available. The style of diving the islands offer is very much like the Bay Islands, but the diver has the chance to experience some real exploration. Many of the fish here have yet to see too many divers and are quite wary, but that just adds to the excitement of diving where few have dived before.

Again the diving is generally walls and the sheer drop-offs are coated in a beautiful mantle of hard corals, sponges and algaes. It appears that the fish life around the Hog Islands is seasonal and during the rainy season and the period leading up to it fewer fish are seen. But at other times it is possible to see huge shoals of Atlantic spadefish and jacks, as well as a profusion of reef varieties. Visitors will also notice the size of the specimens here. Many of the reef fish are larger and stronger looking than others seen on the more dived areas of Honduras.



# Mexico

- |                  |                       |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Isla Cozumel   | 12 Mazatlán           |
| 2 Yucatan        | 13 I. Cedros          |
| 3 Campeche       | 14 I. Santa Magdalena |
| 4 Tabasco        | 15 I. Santa Margarita |
| 5 Veracruz Llave | 16 I. Tiburón         |
| 6 Tuxpan         | 17 Chihuahua          |
| 7 Tampico        | 18 Mexico City        |
| 8 Matamoros      | 19 Monterrey          |
| 9 Sea of Cortez  | 20 La Paz             |
| 10 Acapulco      | 21 Cabo San Lucas     |
| 11 Colima        | 22 Cancún             |



**How to get there** → This depends on where you are going, but the country is well serviced by Mexicana Air, several charter flight companies (Caribbean side) or to get specifically to the Sea of Cortez you can take a flight to Los Angeles, stay overnight and then carry on in the morning with Aero California

**Entry requirements** → You need a full passport and a completed visa form, which is given to you on the plane.

**Inoculations required** → None if you are in a resort or town.

**Language** → The main language is Spanish, but English is widely spoken in resort towns.

**Currency** → The new peso is the main monetary unit but the US dollar is widely accepted in restaurants, taxis and hotels in the resort areas.

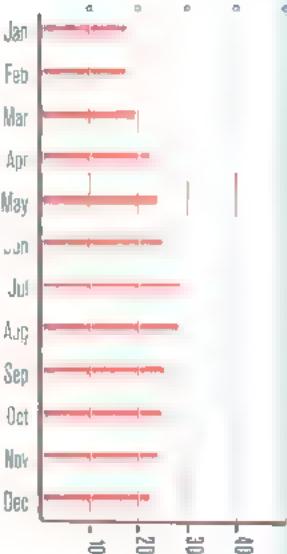
**Tourist Authority** → Mexico Tourist Authority, 8 Halkin Street, London S1W 7DW. Tel 0171 235 6393.

## The country

Mexico offers such a diverse range of experiences that it's difficult for many to comprehend. The country is a mix of desert, rain forest and tropical coastal regions.

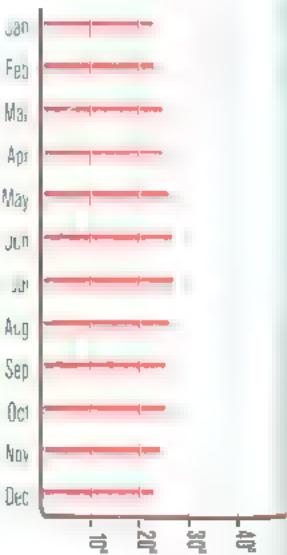


## Pacific



Land Temp. (°C)

## Caribbean



Land Temp. (°C)



For the most part, visitors intending to scuba dive visit either the Caribbean islands of Cancun and Cozumel or the Pacific side along Baja California, although there is a growing interest in cave diving on the Yucatan Peninsula.

Mexico was the first country in the Americas where western man set foot when Columbus landed here in 1492 and the Spanish overran the country's indigenous people soon after. The nation is now made up of a mixed population with Spanish and Indian roots.

Mexico wants to become another North America and, indeed, many of the resort towns and cities already are. Americans seem to flock to Mexico like the Brits swarm to Spain. But it is still easy to get away from the hustle and bustle of busy resorts and there are a number of secluded and peaceful towns that cater for westerners and Mexicans alike.

To give you a real feel for the country we have split it into its two main diving areas.

## The Pacific region

On the Pacific side of Mexico lies the Peninsula of Baja California (below California) and between here and the mainland lies the most prolific body of water on the planet – the Sea of Cortez.

In recent years the Sea of Cortez has seen its natural resources raped, but it still offers some incredible diving experiences. Moves are afoot, thanks mainly to forward-thinking dive centres, to get some of the waters and species here protected and that can only be good news for divers. There are two main diving towns along this narrow piece of desert – Cabo San Lucas and La Paz.

If you want a wild time to go along with the diving, then Cabo is for you. But if you want to experience Mexico's peaceful glory then La Paz which actually means peace, is the choice you should take.

Both these towns offer good accommodation prospects and some very good diving centres and boats. La Paz is getting the limelight in the UK at the moment thanks to the efforts of The Cortez Club, a British/Italian-run dive centre offering everything a diver could wish for.

Other activities to consider at various times of the year are sea kayaking, mountain biking, deep sea game fishing, sunbathing or giant cactus watching.

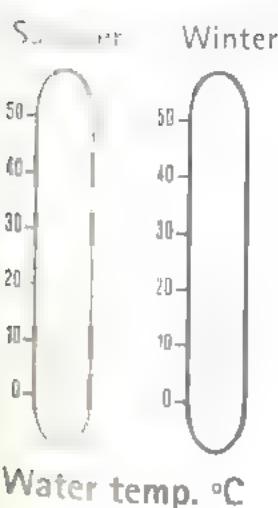
## The diving

The Sea of Cortez is still very unexplored even though divers have been visiting here since sport diving began.

This body of water gives you the chance to dive with tropical fish, huge



### Pacific





shoals of pelagics, manta rays, whale sharks, California sealions and the strange but beautiful hammerhead shark, which forms large schools around several sea mounts.

Most of the diving is concentrated at the south of the peninsula in the towns of Cabo San Lucas and La Paz. But, although these towns offer the diving facilities, the actual dive sites are a little way away, so be prepared for long boat journeys.

There are plenty of sites to choose from, but often specific sites are chosen because of the chance to see various creatures. Out of La Paz, for example, a site called Los Islotes has a Californian sea lion colony, while El Bajío is a collection of sea mounts where hammerhead schools are often seen.

Cabo is slightly different in that it is located at the bottom of the peninsula where the Sea of Cortez meets the mighty Pacific Ocean.

Here you will find the only coral reef in the Sea of Cortez and, in fact, the whole western coast of North America. Called Cabo Pulmo, the site is actually a collection of lengthy rocky ridges coated in corals. The other dive sites around Cortez are made up of rocky reefs and pinnacles.

The weather has a distinct effect on the creatures here. For example, in the winter swarms of krill attract whales, which can be seen on both the Pacific side and within the Sea of Cortez. One of the many winter attractions includes boat trips out into several bays along the Pacific coast to visit grey whales.

In June the warming temperatures create a plankton bloom and bring in giant Pacific mantas and whale sharks. During November and December the wind picks up and can blow out the diving occasionally so this time of year is best avoided.

Many of the sites around Cabo and La Paz have been dived for years, but because of the lack of coral, there appears to be no damage. The sealions at Los Islotes are definitely used to humans, which makes the experience a whole lot better, but if you wish to visit less dived areas you should try a liveaboard that will take you further afield to Los Animas and the islands further north.



## Cancun and Cozumel

**Climate** → As with all Caribbean islands, these two are subjected to hot and humid weather pretty much all year round. The rainy season runs from June to September.

The Mexican islands of Cancun and Cozumel are holiday hot spots for the US market, but have also carved a well-earned niche in the European dive market too.

The islands are among a small group located at the north eastern corner of the Yucatan Peninsula and have gained substantial popularity among US divers over the years.

Cozumel is the largest being 38 miles long and about 11 miles wide at its widest point. Cancun is very close to the mainland, is 14 miles long, but only a quarter of a mile wide and forms an inverted L shape. It is actually connected to the mainland via a causeway which spans the Nohchupet Lagoon.

Cozumel gets the lion's share of visiting divers, but you shouldn't overlook Cancun, which offers just as much enjoyment and just as much nightlife. Cancun is looked on as Mexico's Miami Beach and attracts rich Mexicans and Americans alike. Cozumel on the other hand has only one town, San Miguel, with one main strip offering everything from restaurants to nightclubs.

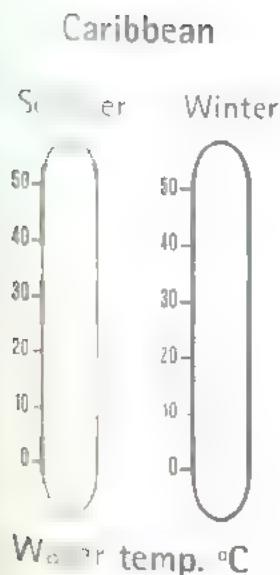
Dive shops, hotels, restaurants and all other tourist amenities are plentiful on both islands, yet somehow they still keep their Mexican charm.

## The diving

Much of Cozumel's diving takes place off the sheltered west coast. All the sites are named and many are buoyed – all are well known.

Current is an everyday occurrence here – it normally runs at about two to four knots, but it has been known to reach eight knots at times. Much of the water along the western coast was designated a marine park in 1980 and so still has a good selection of marine life for the diver to see. In many areas with high levels of diver traffic, the fish don't seem wary of divers and many appear tamed by food hand-outs.

Scuba diving is big business and is the primary source of income for this once sleepy little fishing island. Modern estimates put the number of dive





sponge species and large healthy fish makes the diving very interesting and enjoyable.

The northern and southern extremes are said to be the best, but that's because of the fierce currents experienced – they do attract the bigger pelagics.

The Cozumel port captain has closed the northern reefs – specifically Barracuda Reef – because of the dangers of its currents.

Cancun's diving is really quite different. There are no dramatic walls, yet the gentler slopes have allowed a more varied marine growth to prosper. The reefs are much richer and you have the added benefit of a possible shark encounter.

Black tip, nurse and bull sharks are often seen just off these reefs. The main diving area is off the top western corner of the island, although the

lagoon is very often used for check out and resort dives

Shoals of snappers and jacks are common around Cancun and in the largest reef system, The Tunnel, there is a wide swim-through which looks impressive.

The diving on both islands got a safety boost six years ago with the opening of a hyperbaric treatment centre in Cozumel. It was the creation of an American and it runs through an ingenious donation scheme where every visitor pays US\$1 per dive.

Scuba Way  
Diving Holidays Ltd

*for those who  
take their diving  
seriously*

Tel: 07000 790188

Fax: 01763 274117

E-mail: scubaway@compuserve.com

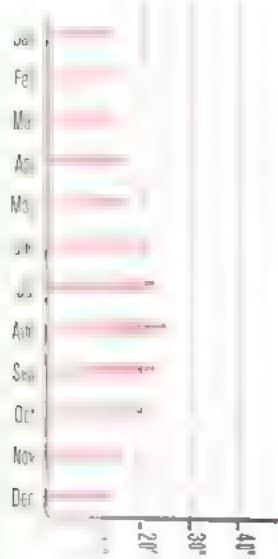
outlets at over 120 and competition is fierce.

The dive sites themselves are a collection of classic Caribbean reefs and walls with large sponges, sea fans, brain corals and patches of lettuce leaf algae. The mix of interesting topography, good quality coral and



- (California)
- 1 San Francisco
  - 2 Los Angeles
  - 3 San Diego
  - 4 S. Clemente I.
  - 5 Channel Is.
  - 6 Santa Cruz
  - 7 Santa Barbara
  - 8 Santa Catalina
  - 9 Monterey
  - 10 Fort Bragg

## Pacific



Land Temp. (°C)

## Florida



Land Temp. (°C)

**How to get there** → Many airlines fly to the US, it just depends on where you want to go. The bigger companies include Virgin Atlantic, British Airways, American Airlines and United Airlines, but there are a number of other companies and several charter airlines that fly during the summer months when package holidays are at their peak.

If you are travelling to either Los Angeles or California or Orlando for Florida, Virgin Atlantic is hard to beat.

The nearest airports to popular dive destinations are:

## Florida

### Destination

Santa Diego  
San Francisco  
Crystal River  
Florida Keys  
Boynton Beach

### Airport

Los Angeles  
San Francisco  
Tampa  
Miami  
Miami

**Entry requirements** → For short stays (less than 90 days) British citizens are required to have a full passport with at least three months still to run, an onward or return ticket and a completed visa waiver form (given to you at the check-in desk or on the flight).

**Climate** → California is warm all year but it really can rain there. Florida has hot summers and warm winters.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → English

**Currency** → US dollar

**Tourist Authority** → American Tourist Authority, 5 Upper Grosvenor Street London W1A 1AE. Tel 0171 499 9000.

## The country

Because the area to cover is so large we have split it into two sections – California and Florida, which are the main diving areas for Brits. Remember though, the US has much, much more diving which is relatively unknown outside the country – that includes sea and inland sites.



## California

Most people tend to know California from what they see in the movies. Fortunately, that is make-believe and reality is much more mundane. Los Angeles does seem to live in a twilight world between reality and so if you are not into over the top Americanism get out of LA as soon as possible. If you like to walk in a world of movie stars in Beveley Hills, see the famous Hollywood Boulevard, visit Disneyland in Anahiem or experience the most well known city on the world, then LA is great.

San Francisco, just up the coast, is one of the world's great cities. A few days to ride its cable cars, visit China Town and Fisherman's Wharf is time well spent.

Most divers come to California to dive the kelp forests or experience blue water shark dives. The best places for this tend to be down the coast at Santa Monica. Yet getting around California is problematical at best and the only real way to see California is by car. The Rental trade is huge in the States and the Yellow Pages is packed with companies.

Once mobile find the Pacific Coast Highway, which runs right next to the shore and, apart from being spectacular, keeps you in contact with all the best diving locations.

Last year this coast was hit hard by the El Niño event which caused weather chaos across the United States. In time, the country and its natural habitats will get back to normal. At the time of writing, the El Niño event was slowly dissipating. The event should stay away for another few years and so we are probably entering a calm period that will make the diving superb.



## The diving

California isn't short of places to dive, or diving experiences. It has giant kelp forests, sea lions, blue sharks, amazing sea life of all kinds, and a dazzling array of colour.

What it hasn't got is high or even consistent water temperatures. The coast is washed by cool Pacific currents, which mix up the water temperature. In places it

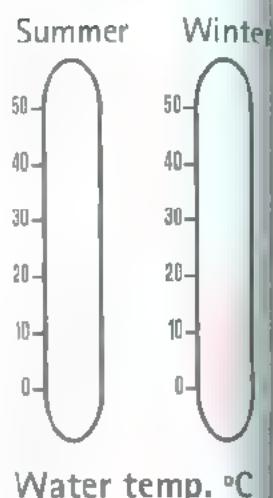
is quite temperate, but in others decidedly cool. All along this coastline the waters from various currents mix producing an incredibly diverse ecosystem and temperatures of between 15° to 20°C.

This fluctuation in temperatures means that almost every dive is different and, around some places, you are treated to different conditions on the same dive.

Incidentally, there are several south facing beaches and several west facing beaches, which gives divers sites to enjoy no matter where the weather is coming from. With the wind from the south the west facing beaches are best, when the wind is from the west then opt for the south facing beaches. California also experiences a warm off shore wind known as the Santa Anna, which is terrible for the numerous surfers that frequent the coast, but great for divers as the Ocean is blown flat and upwelling current bring in huge amounts of sea life.

Starting from the north, in Mendocino County, in and around Fort Bragg, there are a number of State parks and several have some excellent diving

## Pacific



opportunities. Organised diving is relatively scarce here, but there are a couple of dive shops in Fort Bragg.

The more popular dive areas tend to be further south though and start around Monterey to the south of San Francisco. Here you will find a good supply of dive shops and some fantastic cool water diving. Morro Bay is a good site. Much of the diving here centres on Morro Rock, a large outcrop that is surrounded by kelp forest and reef systems.

By far the most popular diving off the California coast occurs around the California Channel Islands. Some of these are quite large, others are much smaller. This group of islands stretches down from the central coast of California to just north of San Diego. Top underwater photographer and film maker, Howard Hall, rates the California Channel Islands as his most favoured dive site in the world.

Many of the islands are part of the Channel Islands National Park, which imposes strict rules on landing on the islands and the protection of the wildlife.

There are plenty of dive operators along the coast making regular trips to the Channel Islands, so finding a dive shop shouldn't be a problem.

Apart from the Channel Islands and kelp forests with the associated marine life, divers also have the opportunity to experience a rare sight – blue sharks. These shy creatures live way out in the ocean, but several companies now offer blue shark trips. You are taken about 20 miles offshore and put into a shark cage. A specially trained instructor then enters the water in a chain mail suit and feeds these magnificent creatures – it is certainly an opportunity of a lifetime.

## Florida

Similar to its counterpart on the west coast, Florida, or more specifically Orlando, is a movie fanatic's and fun-seeker's dream. Again, Universal Studios and the like basically take over so get out as quickly as possible if you don't fancy that sort of thing. If, however, a taste of fantasy is up your street then Orlando will be heaven.

For the most part Florida, in places, looks like a popular Spanish resort – bars, clubs and bright red tourists are abundant. The Keys area is the most touristy and at first glance this can be a little daunting, but there is more to the diving life here.

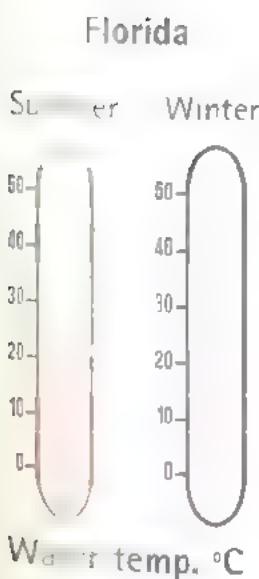
The further down the Keys you head the more remote it becomes and you do tend to leave the seedier side of life behind for the more tranquil existence that divers look for in a holiday – until, that is, you hit Key West and there is no missing the fact you are still in America.

Yet the Keys are not the only diving in Florida as all down the Gulf Coast there are diving opportunities some of which are almost unheard of outside the States. Boynton Beach for example was featured in Sport Diver magazine a couple of years ago. It offers some fantastic diving without huge crowds.

Accommodation in Florida is abundant. The whole state seems geared towards the holiday-maker and you can find any level of room from a rustic motel to a five star resort or hotel.

## The diving

Winter is the time for a truly magical experience in Florida, but it doesn't occur at sea and you are better to snorkel than scuba dive to see it. The



excitement comes from the manatees of Crystal River, which will leave you thrilled to the bone. These West Indian manatees live in and around the mangrove stands of Florida's coast, but come into Crystal River to find the warm water springs and sink holes that dot the area.

Their numbers have fallen dramatically over the years, thanks mainly to boating accidents and a mystery virus that is slowly killing this dwindling populations. There are specific sanctuary areas and speed zones in force between November and March while the manatees are around.

You can book an organised tour or simply hire a boat and head out on your own.

One of the unsung parts of Florida is the Boynton Beach area, which is said to offer some of the best diving in the States. It lies to the north of Miami and has a rather understated reputation outside of America or even Florida. Boynton has enough life to keep any diver going for a good trip and one of the most life-rich reef systems in the whole of Florida.

All around Florida you will find a host of artificial reefs which consist of boats, planes and even tanks, sunk as part of the artificial reefs programme, designed as both diving attractions and wildlife havens.

Some of the best artificial reefs are found around the Keys, which just happen to be the most dived area in the state. The Keys are actually a string of around 200 islands each with a surrounding coral reef system.

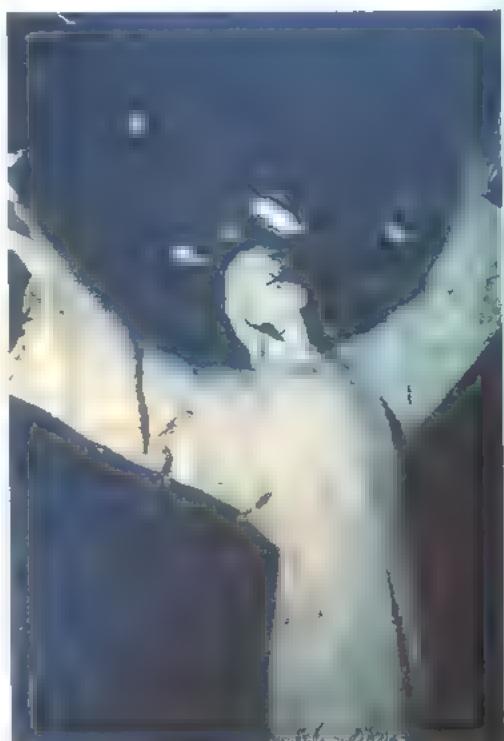
The archipelago stretches for 212 miles from the south west to the north east and sits along the Florida Bank, a geographical ledge that channels warm water from the Gulf Stream into the Gulf of Mexico. This flow of water has created a large reef system that now provides entertainment for millions of divers.

A total of 34 islands are linked by road bridges which make up the famous US Route 1, dubbed the Overseas Highway.

Key Largo is the largest centre in the Keys, but by no means the only diveable area. Sadly, in recent years some of the corals have suffered damage from both the weather (in the form of hurricanes) and from over-diving. On a good note, the Keys and their surrounding waters have been designated as a national marine park and the situation should soon start to improve.

Diving in Florida is still as popular as ever, but people still only really think about the Keys. Do yourself a favour and look towards the mainland and even some of the freshwater sites that offer excellent and different opportunities. Some of Florida's best diving is in the clear waters of the Palm Beach towns north of Miami. Here you find excellent reefs, plentiful marine life and even the odd remains of a Spanish Galleon, although if you can find it so have others, so don't expect treasure. More modern wrecks such as Esso Bonaire, Mizpah and Amarylis are great for metal freaks among you and there's even a Rolls Royce car.

Again, El Niño has caused some problems in Florida and the Everglades area has its own issues. El Niño raised the water temperature enough for many of the corals to bleach. With luck the situation will improve as the water temperature cools as the El Niño event subsides.



## Dive Centres

**Abyssal Diving Charters and Lodge**  
Box 747 Quadra Island,  
B.C. Canada V0P 1N0  
Tel: 001 250 285 2420  
Fax: 001 250 285 2427  
E-mail:  
[abyssal@oberon.ark.com](mailto:abyssal@oberon.ark.com)  
Web site:  
<http://oberon.ark.com/abyssa/>

### Islands

**Isla de Osa Inn**  
Puntarenas SA  
00 506 296 2190  
or 00 506 232 7722  
E-mail:  
[aq\\_aer@sol.racsac.co.cr](mailto:aq_aer@sol.racsac.co.cr)  
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[www.centralamerica.com/cr/hotel/agua](http://www.centralamerica.com/cr/hotel/agua)  
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Coco, Guanacaste, Costa  
 Rica, 5019  
Tel: 00 506 672 0012  
Fax: 00 506 672 0231

E-mail:  
[divng@sol.racsac.co.cr](mailto:divng@sol.racsac.co.cr)  
PADI, NAUI, SS, NASDS  
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Largest and oldest dive  
facility in Costa Rica.  
Nitrox, famous Bat and  
Catalina islands, night  
dives, referrals. Advanced  
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Suites Hotel**  
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Belize, Central America  
Tel: 00 501 26 2055  
Fax: 00 501 26 2461  
E-mail: [corona@bt1.net](mailto:corona@bt1.net)  
Web site:  
<http://www.ambergriscaye.com/>  
[coronade.mer.com/](http://coronade.mer.com/) or  
[www.belize/coronel.com](http://www.belize/coronel.com)  
PADI, NAUI  
Friendly beachfront hotel  
with own dock & sundeck  
near town. Agent for all  
surf and dive shops & guides.  
Personalised service

**Dive Paradise**  
601 Rafael Mellar,  
Cozumel, Quintana Roo,  
Mexico 77600  
Tel: 00 52 9 872 1007  
Fax: 00 52 9 872 1061  
E-mail:  
[appledp@cozumel.com.mx](mailto:appledp@cozumel.com.mx)  
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value & service. Diving &  
instruction from beginner  
to advanced including  
computers & enriched air  
PADI 5 star with DAN  
oxygen on all boats

**God's Pocket Resort**  
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Canada V0N 2P0  
Tel: 001 250 949 9221  
E-mail:  
[godspock@north.sand.net](mailto:godspock@north.sand.net)  
Web site:  
<http://www.Troutes.com/scuba/godspocket.html>



and seafront verandas  
Dive shop service includes  
renting and storing gear

**Rendezvous Dive  
Ventures**  
Box 135 Port Alberni, BC  
Canada V9Y 7M6  
Tel/Fax: 250 720 9306  
E-mail:  
[rendvous@island.net](mailto:rendvous@island.net)  
Web site:  
<http://www.island.net/~rendvous/>



**Resort Divers de  
Costa Rica**  
PO Box 122-5019  
Playas Del Coco,  
Guanacaste, Costa Rica  
Tel: 00 506 670 0421/  
672 0106

Fax: 00 506 670 0421/  
672 0106  
E-mail:  
[beckers@sol.racsac.co.cr](mailto:beckers@sol.racsac.co.cr)  
PADI  
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Bat Islands, instruction,  
snorkel and sunset cruises,  
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quadro-cycles. Hotels Blue  
Bay Village, Papagayo,  
Costa Smeralda.

**Scubaway**  
- 01273 746261  
**Sport Abroad**  
- 01306 744345

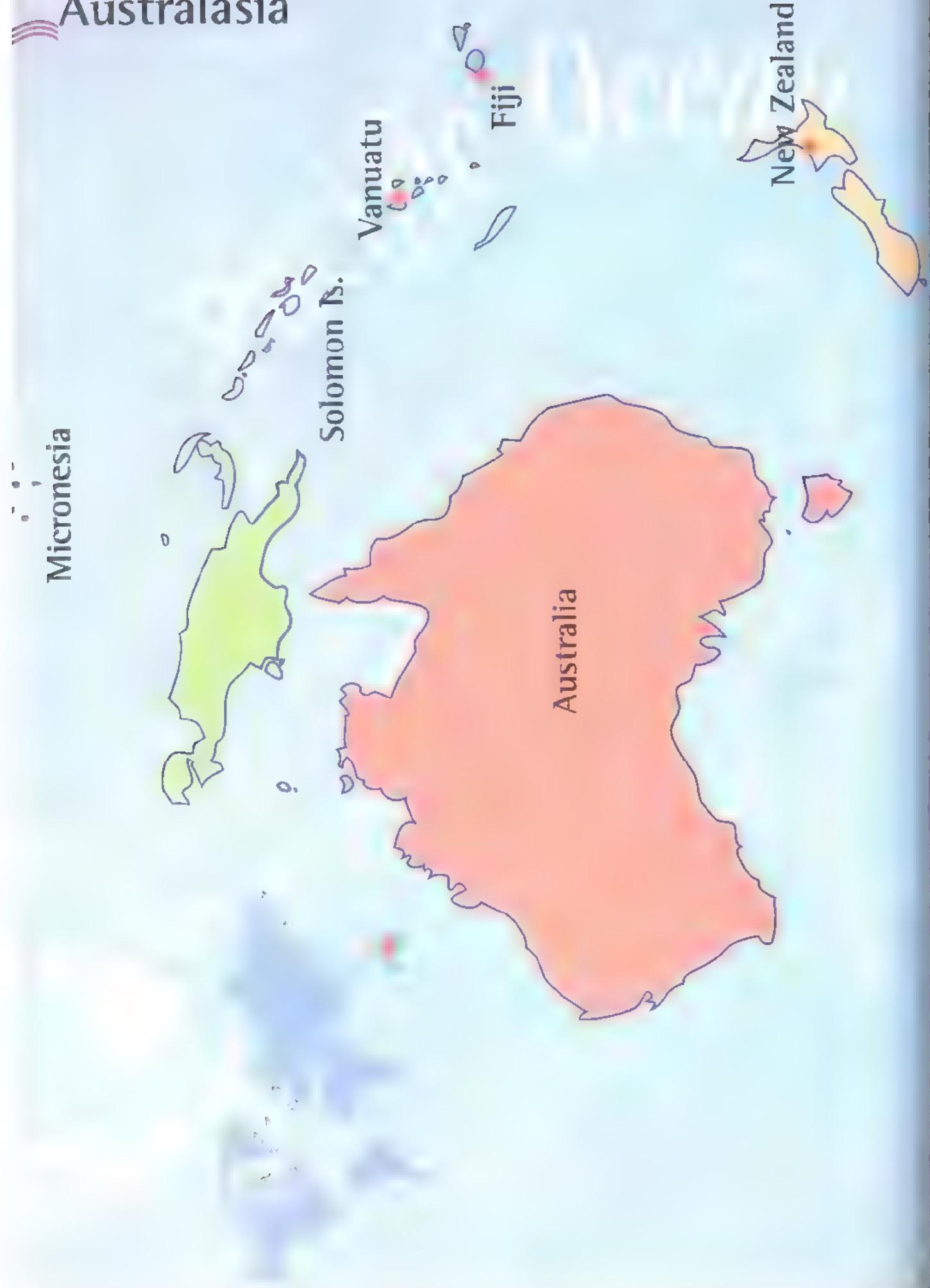
## Tour Operators

**Coral Cay  
Conservation  
(Conservation Society)**  
- 0171 498 6248

**DiveQuest**  
01254 826322  
**Diving World**  
- 0171 407 0019

**Harris Holidays**  
- 01375 396688  
**Hayes & Jarvis**  
- 0181 222 7840

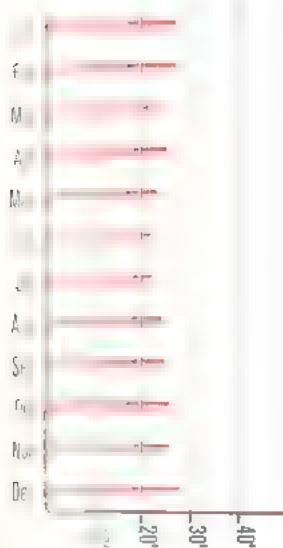
# Australasia



- (Western Australia)
- 1 Exmouth
  - 2 Peron Pen
  - 3 Dirk Hartog I.
  - 4 Shark Bay
  - 5 Karratha
  - 6 Dampier Archipelago
  - 7 Port Hedland
  - 8 Geraldton
  - 9 Perth
  - 10 Bernier I.

- (Queensland)
- 1 Cairns
  - 2 Cape York
  - 3 Peninsula
  - 4 Gulf of Carpentaria
  - 5 Townsville
  - 6 Brisbane
  - 7 Fraser I.
  - 8 Hervey Bay
  - 9 Rockhampton
  - 10 Yeppoon

## Queensland



Land Temp. (°C)

**How to get there** → Australia is huge, so first choose where you want to head for. If it's the Great Barrier Reef or the Coral Sea, you'll need Cairns or Townsville. Alternatively, you can fly into Brisbane and travel up the coast. Western Australia is only really serviced by Perth, but many airlines fly in here. From Perth you can take either a smaller aircraft, bus or train to your chosen destination, but be prepared for long journeys.

Qantas, British Airways, Cathay Pacific and Singapore Airlines are at the top of the airline list, but for those on a tighter budget who don't mind long journey times (sometimes nearly two days with all the stop-overs) try Garuda Indonesia and Aeroflot. Many airlines also include a stop-over or two somewhere in the price of your ticket, this is often worth taking advantage of.

**Entry requirements** → You will require a full passport and a visa. Contact the Australian Embassy in London.

**Climate** → For the most part your stay in Australia will be hot or at least warmer than the UK. The southern climate is very much like the UK's, only milder. The northern reaches are tropical.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Sort of English, with some colourful words and phrases.

**Currency** → Australian dollar. All major currencies can be changed in airports, cities, towns and resorts.

**Tourist Authority** → Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation, Queensland House, 392 The Strand, London WC2R 0LZ. Tel 0171 240 0525.

Australian Tourist Commission, Gemini House, 10-18 Putney Hill, London SW15 6AA. Tel 0181 780 2229.

Western Australia Tourism Commission, Western Australia House, 115 Strand, London WC2R 0AJ. Tel 0171 240 2881.

## The country

It is a common misconception that all of Australia is hot all the time, the country is so large it experiences a varying climate. The Northern Territories, much of Queensland and the northern section of Western Australia lie above the Tropic of Capricorn and are, therefore, tropical regions, but the southern section of the country is as far south of the Equator as Italy is north. So in places such as Melbourne, the temperature changes are quite varied and not

## Perth



Land Temp. (°C)

# Australia



too unlike Britain, although it doesn't get quite so cold during their winter (our summer).

Because of this variation, the diving around the coast of Australia is also quite varied. Whenever people think about diving Australia, it is always the coral of the Great Barrier Reef or the Coral Sea that gets the attention. But this is by no means the be all and end all of Australian diving. We have split the diving information into sections to show you the variety available.

The north eastern seaboard is certainly the most popular destination for British travellers and at some places you could be forgiven for thinking you were in a part of Britain with a more favourable climate and a more inviting sea. This has made the north eastern seaboard a holiday destination for the entire world and the tourist infrastructure is well and truly established.

If you want to get away from all that you can visit one of the many islands off the coast. Lizard Island and Heron Island are probably the most well known, but there are over twenty islands with resorts running from north of Cairns down the coast to Brisbane.

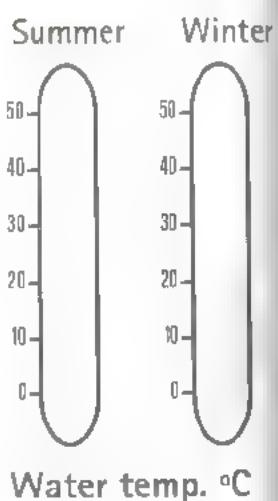
Queensland itself is huge – two and a half times the size of Texas – and the Great Barrier Reef runs down the coast several miles out to sea for some 1,600 miles. So you have plenty of choice when it comes to a diving holiday. The reef was designated a fragile environment by the World Heritage Society and various sensitive areas are closed to divers, but with so much to visit you will not get bored.

Inland Australia has tropical rainforests, deserts, mountains and more wildlife than you can shake a stick at.

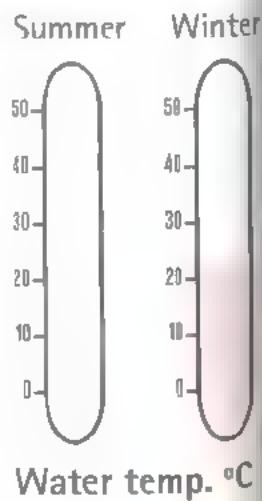
Western Australia, by comparison, is not nearly as crowded and many believe it is a lot better for it. The coastline and sea is cooler than the north eastern area, and there is no profusion of coral. But Western Australia has other experiences to equal anything the coral reefs can throw at you.

To visit Western Australia is to really taste adventure. The scenery is breathtaking and was created during the dreamtime according to the Aborigines. The state is about ten times the size of the UK and comparatively empty of man. It truly is a place where you can either get away from everything, or get involved in everything. One of the most special diversions for divers is a visit to Monkey Mia in the Shark Bay World Heritage and

## Queensland



## Western Australia



Marine Park, where you can hand feed the wild bottlenosed dolphins that come in.

The main city, Perth, is located in the southern part of the state. It is a cosmopolitan place offering you all the benefits of this young and lively country.



## The diving

**Queensland** → Almost every diver has heard of the Great Barrier Reef and in turn the Great Barrier Reef has seen many, many divers. It is an incredibly popular dive destination offering the largest expanse of coral reef on the planet. In fact, it is the largest natural structure visible from space. The 1600 miles of reef provide the many dive centres along the coastline with an almost inexhaustible supply of dive sites.

A few have become famous the world over. Cod Hole, for example, is a site where huge coral groupers, known as potato cod, have been hand fed and are very tame and stand up there in the animal-experience league alongside Stingray City in the Caymans.

Contrary to popular belief, the Great Barrier Reef is not just one long coral structure, but a series of large reefs, ribbon reefs and coral islands. This creates a wealth of different diving opportunities from walls to classic reefs, caverns to drift dives.

The inshore reefs generally offer sheltered coral gardens, gentle reef slopes covered in hard coral growth. Fish life generally features the myriad of reef species, but white-tip reef sharks and rays are common.

Much of the diving is fairly easy and stress free and so the inshore reefs are ideal places to learn to dive – an act that has spawned an entire industry in Cairns, Port Douglas region. There are hundreds of dive schools catering for the learn to dive market.

The outer reefs are a little wilder and offer a more dramatic experience. The drop-offs are steeper, there are large bommies and the fish are larger and the species list contains more pelagics such as jacks, barracuda and sharks.

Larger day boats and liveaboards reach this area, which apart from being huge has numerous dive sites, so crowds aren't a problem. Some of the more popular spots such as Cod Hole, Pixie Pinnacle and Watanabe Bommie can become crowded, but on the whole diving out here is a rugged and thrilling experience.

Another way to get away from the crowds and island holiday is a good idea. Here you are generally closer to the reef and have easier access to some of the best sites.

For a more adventurous time there is always the Coral Sea. It can only be reached by liveaboard, but there are several of these, from large powerful boats operated by

# Australia



the likes of Mike Ball to small intimate yachts such as the *Rum Runner*. The liveaboards tend to leave from either Cairns, Port Douglas or Townsville and take about a night to reach the fringes of this expansive area.

Much of the Coral Sea is untouched and let's hope it stays that way. Here the sharks control the waters, not man. The reef

structures all rise from the seabed many hundreds of metres below creating a wealth of wall dives. The area covers hundreds of thousands of square miles, giving unlimited scope for spectacular diving

Some of the reefs are popular with liveaboards and some even have permanent attractions such as the shark feed put on by Mike Ball Expeditions. One of the most exciting dives on many return trips from the Coral Sea is a visit to the famous wreck of the SS Yongala. She was a passenger liner who went down in a cyclone in 1903. She was found 36 years later by the Australian Navy. These days she makes an incredible dive, but is also very popular. There are several large fish (groupers mainly) that have become tame, and there is legislation preventing divers from harming them.

**Western Australia** → For the greatest experience of your life the best time to visit Western Australia is during March and April. This is the time

when the western corals spawn and a reef known as Ningaloo becomes the focal point for the incredibly beautiful whale shark. Exmouth, a town dedicated to the whale shark, is the main town and diving and snorkelling trips generally leave from here. Sophisticated operations use a microlite aircraft to spot



**NINGALOO REEF** from ..... £1439  
**GREAT BARRIER REEF** from .. £1599  
**TRUK LAGOON** from ..... £1579  
**PALAU** from ..... £1640  
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**TEL: (01704) 573714 SURE DIVE or  
(01253) 713900**  
**DISTANT HORIZONS**



Whale shark snorkelling over Ningaloo Reef is a thrilling experience



these huge creatures and direct the boat.

In recent years whale shark watching has become immensely popular and so it is best to book in advance. The popularity has also led to a price war and so snorkelling with these wonderful creatures has now never been so cheap.. Outside this season, Ningaloo reef itself is well worth a visit as its the largest fringing reef found so close to shore. It offers beautiful underwater life and a pretty reef system the stretches for 260 kilometres and is packed with incredible marine life. There are some 460 species of reef fish here and numerous species of coral, making it a great dive destination in anyone's book. The majority of visitors come here for the whale sharks, but there is more to it than that

For example out of Dunsborough, south of Perth, lies the *HMAS Swan*, the largest ship to be scuttled in the southern hemisphere. She was sunk deliberately as a diving attraction in December last year. She now lies in 30m within a no-fishing area within the safety of the Cape Naturaliste.

There's also the Navy Point at Port Murat, which is rated within the top ten of Australian dive sites. It is a series of pylons covered in life and they are regularly buzzed by huge grouper.

Western Australia is also one of the few places on the planet where you can, if lucky, dive with the great white shark. The famous Rodney Fox has special white shark adventure trips that travel out to a group of remote islands known as the Neptune Islands, where a large colony of seals live year round. The reef here, is aptly called Dangerous Reef. At pupping time (March, April and May) the white sharks come into the shallow water. As in other places a white shark sighting can't be guaranteed. They are rare fish and extremely shy, but your chances are quite good with Rodney's expertise

These are the best known and best organised dive areas around the entire coastline of Australia, but you can dive almost anywhere. There are dive centres in every state and the diving in all areas is pretty good, so if you have a chance to travel extensively around Australia, don't just dive the obvious.

Try some of the lesser known areas and you could be pleasantly surprised.

# Fiji

- |                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1 Yasawa Islands | 12 Kainbu     |
| 2 Viti Levu      | 13 Vanua Levu |
| 3 Tokoriki       | 14 Matagi     |
| 4 Beachcomber    | 15 Nomenala   |
| 5 Mana           | 16 Taveuni    |
| 6 Malolo         |               |
| 7 Vatulele       |               |
| 8 Kadavu         |               |
| 9 Beqa           |               |
| 10 Ovalau        |               |
| 11 Wakaya        |               |



**How to get there** → The main international airport is Nadi and scheduled flights leave from London Heathrow. Carriers include Air New Zealand, Air Pacific and Qantas. Flights are not direct and you can stop off either in the States, New Zealand or Singapore or even Australia. Getting around the island chain either involves a domestic flight or a boat journey

**Entry requirements** → A full passport valid for at least six months.

**Climate** → South Pacific islands, bathed in sunshine, dressed in coconut palms and lapped by warm waters – what do you think the temperature is? Yes we are talking tropical conditions here. However there are various factors to consider. The eastern sides of the main islands have twice the rainfall of the sheltered western sides and generally slightly lower temperatures. The leeward islands are sunny, hot and dry.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Fijian is the official language, but English is widely spoken.

**Currency** → Fiji dollar

**Tourist Authority** → Fijian Embassy, 34 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5DN. Tel 0171 584 3661.

## The country

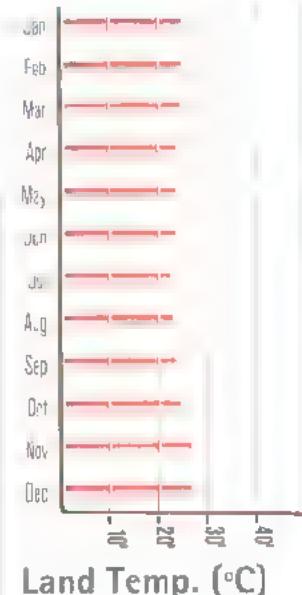
Fiji is actually a collection of some 800 small islands lying between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Equator, about 1,700 miles north east of Sydney and just under 3,000 miles south west of the Hawaiian chain.

Most of the islands are volcanic in origin, but several are coral or limestone outcrops. Many have beautiful sandy palm fringed beaches and an environment to die for.

The islands themselves are lushly decorated in tropical rainforests on the windward side and rather sparsely vegetated on the drier leeward sides. The volcanic islands tend to have dramatic cliffs and tumbling waterfalls whereas the lower-lying coral islands are surrounded by golden beaches. The limestone ones are not so lucky and have steep cliff faces.

About 100 islands are inhabited and the others have been given over to nature. There are two main islands – Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. The capital, Suva, is found on Viti Levu. The majority of the population live on these two islands, yet only about 40 percent of them live in urban areas.

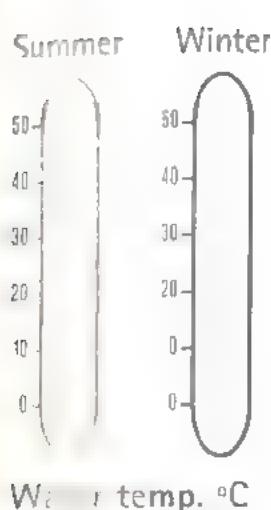
The islands were discovered by Europeans in 1643, but weren't settled or



explored until the 18th century. The original western visitors to the islands were shipwrecked sailors, escaped convicts and missionaries.

Britain claimed Fiji in 1874 and imported Indian sugar workers and a number of new illnesses which nearly killed off the indigenous population. In an amazing and uncharacteristic display, the colonial government took the locals' side and health schemes were implemented.

These days Fiji is still a very traditional culture, although it has benefited from a profitable sugar industry. As with many tropical islands all over the world, Fiji's tourist industry is playing an increasingly important role and has given the economy an even greater boost.



## The diving

The diving in Fiji, as in many destinations in the South Pacific, is stunning and exciting. It is rated as the soft coral capital of the world and it isn't hard to see why. Large soft corals, that you can only describe as trees, can be found all over the sea bed and reef systems, from close to the surface to well below diving depths. This is possibly thanks to the 30 metres plus visibility that keeps the depths well lit.

Some of the best experiences divers can have here are the fantastic drifts. These are at times high-speed affairs, but when you are surrounded by jacks and sharks who care how fast you are moving.

Plankton blooms during April and May or November and December can spoil the visibility, but in turn it brings in the filter feeding whale-sharks and manta rays. Apart from these big beasts, Fiji is also well known for its smaller creatures – the crinoids and antheas. Also on offer are green and hawksbill turtles, and more pelagic fish than can fit in your vision.

Out of the many islands to choose from, Fiji diving devotees tend to choose Kadavu – the fourth largest island in the group. The island earned its reputation firstly to two reefs, Astrolabe and Solo. As diving facilities grew and more exploration was carried out two new reefs – Namalata and Tavuki – were discovered.

However, the actual number of dive sites in the nation is staggering. For a new frontier (a description often used for Fiji) the diving fraternity has certainly not stood still when it comes to finding dive sites.

On Viti Levu most of the dive boats head into Beqa Lagoon – at almost ten miles across, it is actually the crater of an extinct volcano. It isn't the best place in the nation, and hundreds of dives in this area have left it looking a bit haggard, but there is plenty of other stuff to choose from.

The Yasawa and Mamanuca Island groups are reputed to have the best diving on the northwestern side of Viti Levu. Unlike most other places in Fiji, this area has few soft corals, but hard corals abound here and the visibility is often stunning. Another interesting area is Vatulele. It is located about seven miles off the coast of Viti Levu and is noted for its spectacular underwater scenery and the chance to spot all sorts of creatures from the sacred red prawns to white tip reef sharks.

A diver could visit Fiji time and again and not do the same dive twice. The marine life is outstanding, the reefs in great condition and the people are warm and friendly what more could you ask for?



Cressi has filed its new Safety 102 compensator with a whole range of safe ideas. Firstly, two exceptionally roomy gusset pockets with wide plastic-coated zips and a webbed internal pocket for weights with Velcro fastening. Not to mention an abdominal strip with Freematic system, adjustable stretch cummer strap and a whole host of handy details such as an adjustable anatomical back-pack with padded covering a rear carrying handle, double sprung clips, five stainless steel accessory rings, whistle and fastening with adjustable buckle at the top of the shoulder straps which prevents them coming loose. The tough, tear-proof Cordura 1000 denier fabric is virtually indestructible. The

Safety 102 features large, strong buckles which are easy to handle. The closely-woven fabric straps could not be simpler to move or adjust. Optimum distribution of volume ensures maximum air capacity for all divers and a truly comfortable fit. Cressi's own direct feed which is light and easy to use. Finally, the elegant new two-tone fluorescent profiles are highly visible in the water, ensuring that the Safety 102 reflects Cressi's stringent safety standards.



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AGENT FOR UK AND IRELAND  
Mr. James Moul - Phone: 01484 310131  
Fax: 01484 310131



**How to get there** → There are international airports at Auckland and Christchurch and carriers include Air New Zealand, Qantas, British Airways and Cathay Pacific.

**Entry requirements** → British citizens need only a full passport for a six month stay.

**Climate** → The North Island of New Zealand is within the sub tropical band but the south island is temperate. Being on the other side of the planet, Summer and Winter are opposite to our own.

**Inoculations required** → None

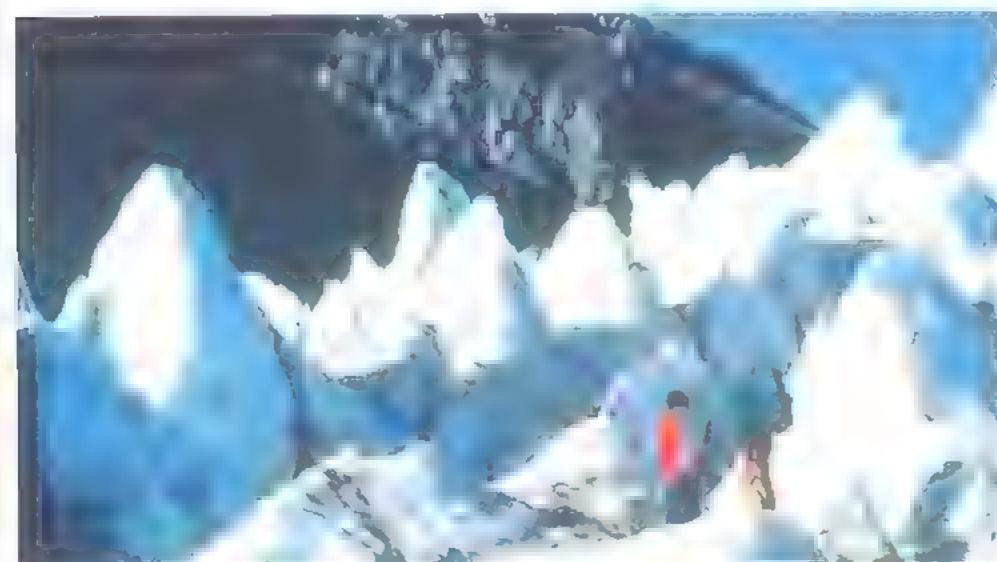
**Language** → English, with a New Zealand accent – don't mistake it for an Australian one because they don't like it.

**Currency** → New Zealand dollar

**Tourist Authority** → New Zealand Tourism Board, New Zealand House 80 Haymarket, London SW1Y 4TQ. Tel 0839 300 900.

## The country

Many people think New Zealand is right on Australia's doorstep, but it is actually a couple of thousand miles away to the south east. The country consists of two main islands, and several smaller ones, which cover about 103,735 square miles – a little larger than Britain.



# New Zealand



The country is world famous for its outdoor activities and when you think of bungee jumping, white-water rafting and sea kayaking, New Zealand often springs to mind. That doesn't include the other activities the country offers from skiing and mountain-biking to rap-jumping (running down cliffs) and parachuting.

With all the adrenaline-charged activities available, the likes of snorkelling and scuba diving tend to get a bit lost, but they shouldn't, because New Zealand has some world-class dive sites.

New Zealand really is geared up for travellers and holidaymakers. There is a broad range of accommodation from top class five-star international hotels all the way down to

camp-sites. You can even stay in a farmstay, which is a working farm which takes in paying guests – something like a B&B.

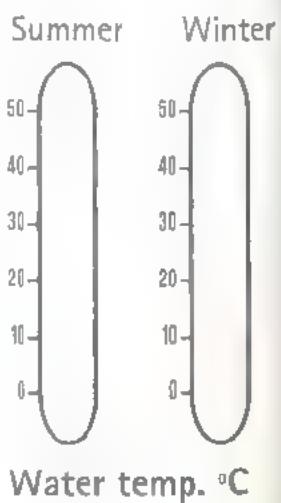
New Zealand has been separated from any other landmass for over 100 million years and so has a number of unique animals and plants. The kiwi is the most famous of these and is recognised as a symbol (albeit unofficial) of the nation.

New Zealand has no snakes, spiders or large carnivores – in fact, it has no poisonous animals at all. The water is safe to drink and inoculations are not required, making it one of the safest places on earth. Perhaps that's why they go in for so many dangerous sports.

As a holiday destination, New Zealand is almost perfect. It has incredible scenery, beautiful wildlife, friendly people and some of the best activities a person can experience.

## The diving

New Zealand's diving is pretty awesome. The diving is considered to be year round, even though the water, at times, can be fairly cool. However, the water temperature doesn't affect the quality. You have world famous sites





such as the Poor Knights, the Bay of Islands, the South Island fjords and the wreck of the *Rainbow Warrior* to keep you occupied – and many others to boot.

New Zealand has a total of ten marine reserves of which Poor Knights is just one. It was designated as such in 1981 and now no spearfishing or commercial fishing is permitted. The Poor Knights reserve is heralded by many, including Jacques-Yves Cousteau, as one of the best 10 dive areas in the world, thanks mainly to the profusion of fish – the site is likened to a huge aquarium of wild fish.

Poor Knights isn't just one dive though as there are numerous sites here. In fact you could quite easily spend several days diving here and still be spoiled.

As everywhere with large fish concentrations, fishermen have spoiled the treat. But now, thanks to its park status, the fish life here is clawing its way back. There are several moorings at the Poor Knights and the nearest dive shops are in Tutukaka, about a 40 minute boat ride away.

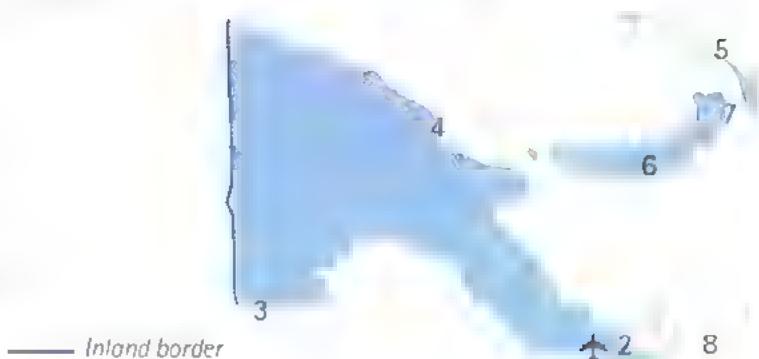
The Bay Islands are the last resting place of the Greenpeace ship the *Rainbow Warrior*. The vessel was laid to rest 12 years ago after it was blown up by the French secret service. It may not be the greatest wreck dive in the world, but what it lacks in aesthetics, it more than makes up for in history. The Bay of Islands is also a great place to snorkel with wild whale-sided dolphins.

New Zealand's diving infrastructure is well established and dive centres are found all over both islands. Many offer diving packages, instruction, gear rental and are happy to give you advice on local diving sites.

If you would like more information about diving New Zealand you can contact the New Zealand Underwater Association, PO Box 875, Auckland, New Zealand.

# Papua New Guinea

- 1 Admiralty Is.
- 2 Port Moresby
- 3 Torres Str
- 4 Madang
- 5 New Ireland
- 6 New Britain
- 7 Rabaul
- 8 D'Entrecasteaux Arch



**How to get there** → All travellers arrive at Jackson's International Airport about five miles from the capital Port Moresby. If you fly in with the national carrier, Air Niugini, you will receive discounts on internal flights during your stay. Air Niugini flies from Hong Kong, Singapore and Manila and finding an airline to these destinations is quite easy. For a British contact try Air New Guinea, which is contacted on 0171 707 4146. Qantas also flies into PNG and there are a number of other internal airline companies.

**Entry requirements** → A 30-day visa is available on arrival at Port Moresby. You will also need a valid passport, an onward air ticket and proof you have enough money to support yourself in the country. This does change from time to time, so check with the tourist authority first.

**Departure tax** → A tax of 15 kina is levied when you leave the country.

**Climate:** → The country has a varied terrain and a varied climate from tropical lowland heat to snow on Mount Victoria. Rainfall is 200-500cms a year, but even so there is a distinct wet season in the north. The south is less affected by the rainy seasons, but that doesn't mean it will be glorious all the time. The best times to visit PNG are April to June and September to November when the weather is at its calmest.

**Health** → Papua New Guinea is a high risk malaria area and there are many chloroquine-resistant strains. Therefore, it is best to use other anti-malarial drugs such as Maloprim or Iarium or both. You should also take plenty of repellent.

**Inoculations required** → Hepatitis A, polio, typhoid and tetanus are also recommended.

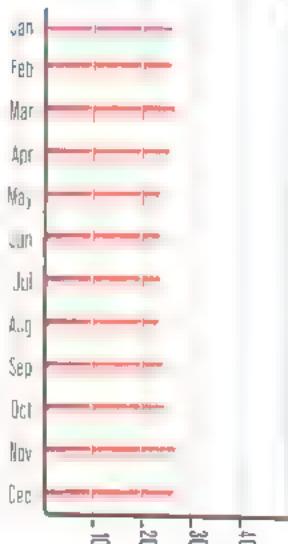
**Language** → This is a tricky one because there are over 700 languages spoken on PNG. Pidgin English and Motu though are the official languages.

**Currency** → The legal tender in PNG is the kina, which is divided into toea (100 toea to one kina).

**Tourist Authority** → Papua New Guinea High Commission, 14 Waterloo Place, London SW1R 4AR. Tel 0171 930 0922, fax 0171 930 0828

## The country

Papua New Guinea lies in the Pacific Ocean to the northeast of the northern



Land Temp. (°C)

# Papua New Guinea

tip of Queensland, Australia. The majority of the country is the eastern half of the largest island on the planet – New Guinea. But there are thousands of outer islands. Some, such as New Britain and New Ireland, are huge and others form small island archipelagos. New Guinea is split virtually down the centre in a straight line from top to bottom. The western half of the island is taken up by the Indonesian state of Irian Jaya.

PNG's landmass is about twice that of Britain, but it has under four million inhabitants, making it one of the least populated countries in the world. It was also one of the last to be discovered by western explorers. Although the island's coastline was first mapped in the 1870s, by Captain John Moresby, it wasn't until the 1930s that anyone explored the interior of the huge island. One remote tribe was discovered only as recently as 1993!

Even though this lushly forested country is still giving up its secrets slowly, it was considered a very important territory and fiercely fought over during the Pacific theatre of World War II.

Throughout the country there are numerous war wrecks both in the forests and underwater. Many of these are warplanes – fighters and bombers – from both the Japanese and the Allies and they simply lie rotting away, reminders of a violent past.

The country itself is surrounded by three seas – the Solomon Sea, the Bismarck Sea and the Coral Sea – and is richly endowed with forests, valleys, swamps and rivers. There are several mountain ranges that basically cut the northern part of the country off from the south. In fact PNG has the third highest mountain range in the world, coming in behind the Himalayas and the Andes.

This extreme height above sea level adds to the diversity of the flora and fauna of Papua New Guinea, which claims some 700 species of plants, 700 species of birds and numerous mammals and reptiles. The sea is equally diverse and the waters around the island are considered some of the richest on the planet.

At the moment it is best to travel to PNG with an organised tour, partly because it will be easier and perhaps cheaper for you and also it will possibly be safer. For although the people of PNG are friendly on the whole, you should not go out in the main towns at night or travel without a guide.

The villages are extremely territorial and mini wars break out regularly. However, tourists are not seen as a threat or as hostage material. In fact it is possible to visit many villages and get a first hand look at Mudmen and Wigmen dressed to the nines ready for a fight with a neighbouring tribe.

Accommodation in PNG is quite varied and includes some very lovely resorts, liveaboards and hotels. Most visitors stay a while in Port Moresby before travelling on to their ultimate destination and some travel around the islands during their stay.

The country is so vast that you have no hope of seeing it all in two weeks, so try to organise a tour that suits your requirements.

## The diving

Many of the world's best underwater photographs come from the waters of Papua New Guinea and it isn't hard to see why – the seas are brimming with life. Diving was one of the first tourist activities to get a foothold here and is very well organised. There are a number of special resorts with day boats and several liveaboards which ply the waters around the various islands.



# Papua New Guinea



The best known resort is Walindi in Kimbe Bay, New Britain. The resort offers divers a full service including accommodation and day boats to Kimbe Bay's great dive sites. Of the liveaboards that sail these waters *MV Telita*, and *FeBrina* are the best known in the UK travel market, although Mike Ball's latest *Paradise Sport* has started operating this year. There are other resorts and boats, of course, but they are not so well known in Britain.

Diving in PNG is a mixture of outstanding Pacific reefs, dramatic coral walls and superb WWII wrecks – a combination of ships, planes and even tanks. Yes, tanks. Just off Duke of York Island in New Britain Province two Japanese tanks lie in shallow water. They are thought to have come from a cargo ship that was bombed.

There are some excellent plane wrecks from Japanese Zeros to American B-17 bombers in these waters too. Some are quite deep, but others are well within the limits. There are so many plane wrecks in PNG waters that it led an Australian film crew to make a programme about the Australian ones. They tracked down the original pilots to hear the story of how the planes found their way to the bottom. It makes fascinating watching.

But you can see WWI wrecks all along the Pacific rim. What makes PNG special is its reefs and marine life. Every inch of reef is inhabited. Life simply thrives here from the smallest nudibranch up to hammerhead sharks and huge schools of barracuda. Hard and soft corals create a resplendent backdrop for numerous and huge sea fans decorated with crinoids. Read any article about diving in the waters off PNG and it will be laced with so many superlatives that it will make your eyes bulge.

Destinations like the Red Sea are considered colourful by many, but they are dull in comparison to PNG. Here, the colour comes not only from the soft corals and reef fish, but also from the sea stars, crinoids, sea whips, sponges, gorgonian seafans and several anemone species.

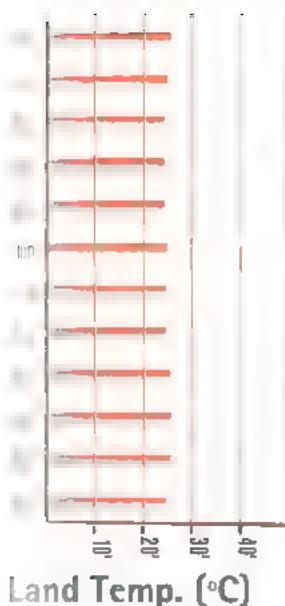
The backdrop looks as if it was created by a deranged artist with a paint brush and an endless supply of technicolour paint. At depth these colours are absorbed so take a torch with you.

Virtually all the dives have both shallow and deep sections and the reefs are all pristine, ideal conditions for divers of all abilities who can spend as much time in the water as they need – another reason underwater photographers love this place.

# Solomon Islands



- 1 Choiseul
- 2 Santa Isabel
- 3 New Georgia
- 4 Vangunu
- 5 Guadalcanal
- 6 Malaita
- 7 Ulawa
- 8 San Cristobal
- 9 Rennell I.
- 10 Santa Cruz Is.



**How to get there** → This isn't easy. First you have to fly to Australia and then double back on yourself. Fly to Queensland with Qantas, British Airways or any of the many airlines heading that way. Then transfer to a Solomons Air flight to Honiara on Guadalcanal (usually after a day or two stopover).

**Entry requirements** → A full passport, a return ticket and enough money to keep yourself during your stay.

**Climate** → For most of the year the Solomons are hot, humid and sunny, but from January to March it rains quite heavily at times. This doesn't affect the temperature too much, but during this season cyclones can hit.

**Inoculations required** → None if you are on a boat.

**Language** → English is the official language although there are a total of 70 different regional languages.

**Currency** → Solomon Islands dollar

**Tourist Authority** → Solomon Islands Tourist Office, Hunter House, Biggin Hill, Kent TN16 3BN Tel 01959 540737.

## The country

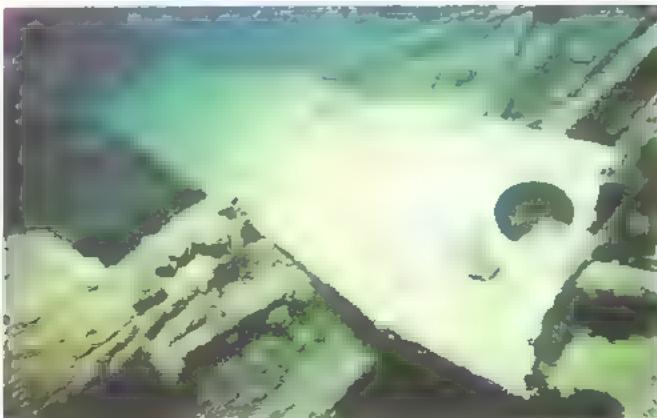
The Solomons archipelago first entered the world stage in 1942 when the US launched the first land offensive action against the Japanese in the South Pacific theatre of World War II. The battles took place on the small jungle-covered island of Guadalcanal. Both navies and airforces were involved in this bloody campaign and it is their legacy that really keeps people interested in this tiny archipelago north east of Papua New Guinea.

The islands stretch over a thousand miles or so, but the land mass is much smaller. The islands include Choiseul, Santa Isabel, New Georgia, Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira and several hundred other small dots in the warm South Pacific. They were once a British Protectorate, but gained independence in 1978.

The majority of visitors come here to see the war relics which are visible both on land and underwater. All through the jungle there are rotting tanks, planes and, more gruesomely, human skulls.

The capital of the Solomons is Honiara on Guadalcanal and here you can still find villagers dressed in traditional clothes wandering around mixing with the more westernised in their 7UP T-shirts. Some older Solomon Islanders are only one generation away from the cannibal culture!

# Solomon Islands



Solomons is a mix of lush tropical reefs, big pelagic species and numerous wrecks from the Second World War.

The islands have long been regarded as a destination to die for and visitors quickly see why. What brings most divers here, though, isn't the quality of the natural reefs, but the man-made ones. There's no need to intentionally sink any wrecks in the Solomons because many naval engagements took place within the confines of the islands and have produced more than enough heavy metal viewing. There are shipwrecks and plane wrecks aplenty – and many a lot shallower than you will find elsewhere in the Pacific.

Guadalcanal is one of the hot spots for shipwrecks, as well as plane wrecks, and some are even diveable from the shore. Some of the wrecks, especially the planes, lie in shallow lagoons with terrible visibility because of plankton blooms in the warm water, but still make interesting dives. The ones out at sea do benefit from clear water, but all are in good condition and have survived well over fifty years.

Wreck sites are found all around Guadalcanal and in Marovo (the world's largest lagoon on Guadalcanal), Munda and Gizo in the New Georgia Islands.

For divers not interested in wrecks, the Solomons has some stunning coral covered walls and reefs. Colour is provided by crinoids of all hues that drape themselves over the corals and cling precariously to the delicate branches of seafans. This scene is often overlaid by a wealth of reef fish and pelagics in the foreground who patrol the reefs in search of food.

Outstanding reef systems include those found near Russell and Nggeia Islands, Mborokua and Munda.

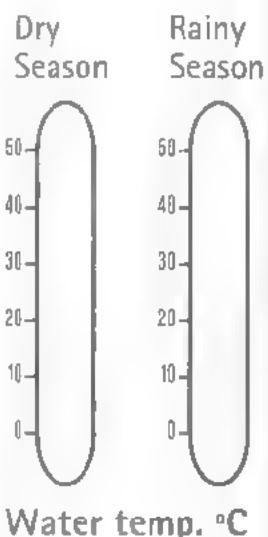
Diving facilities are very good and well run. There are several land-based operations on the islands as well as a couple of good liveaboards. A few dive tour specialists in the UK have taken the Solomons on, so you don't have to struggle and make the arrangements yourself.

Hon'ara is home to about 35,000 people and is quite a bustling place. It's where most tourists enter and leave the country and start their journeys through the archipelago. Getting around is either a case of getting on a boat for a short journey or a plane for longer ones.

The Solomons is a beautiful country with much to explore. The jungle is right on your doorstep, the water is warm and the sunsets are stunning.

## The diving

The diving in the



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# Cook islands

**The Cook Islands** → How to get there: Air New Zealand flies to Rarotonga from Auckland, Fiji, Hawaii, and even Los Angeles. Air Rarotonga flies between the islands.

**Entry requirements** → You must have a valid passport and an onward or return ticket.

**Climate** → All of the islands are considered tropical oceanic and are hot all year round, but affected by wind and rain. From October to April, it can be quite windy and it tends to rain from April to June.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → This varies depending on what island you are visiting and, in some cases, which village. In resort areas English is widely spoken.

**Currency** → New Zealand Dollars

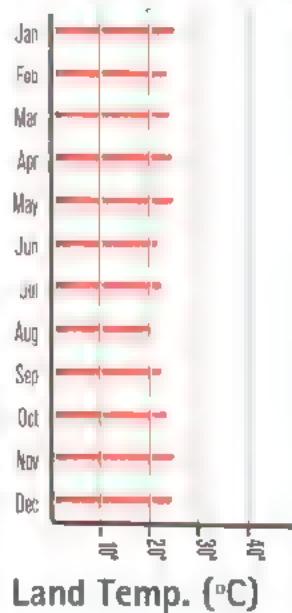
## The country

The Cook Islands are widely scattered in Southeast Pacific Ocean. They are almost central within the triangle of Polynesia west of French Polynesia and Northeast of New Zealand. There are 15 islands in total split into two groups. The southern group is where the capital island Rarotonga is found along with Aitutaki, Mangaia, Atiu, Mauke, Mitiaro, Palmerston, Takutea and Manuae. The northern group is more dispersed and consists of Pukapuka, Manihiki, Penrhyn, Rakahanga, Nassau and Suwarrow. They are a dependency of New Zealand, but are self-governing and have been since 1965.

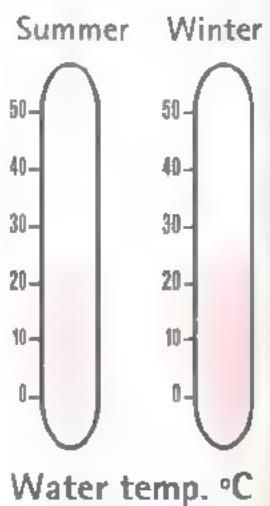
## The diving

The water around the Cook Islands is typical of the South Pacific. There are fringing and outer reef formations, walls, canyons, caves and even a few wrecks to explore. The Islands don't get too much press regarding its sub-surface attraction which is a shame because it has a lot to offer. Much of the area is undiscovered simply because the dive centres are only on a few islands such as Rarotonga and Aitutaki.

Only ten divers are allowed at any one site, so apart from offering pristine coral formations, each area there is no chance of coming across hordes of divers. Some of the best sites include: Matavera Drop: A wall starting in 15m and descending to 35m. Here you will find numerous mushroom and table corals as well as multi-coloured giant clams and white tip reef sharks. Nagatangi'a Swim-throughs: An area strewn with huge coral-covered boulders, between the rocks are gaps large enough for a diver and here you will find the more unusual species including 'Old Stony' a resident stonefish. There are also lionfish and large morays. Koromiri Coral Gardens: A pleasant and easy dive offering spectacular amounts of reef fish including the strange leaf fish. Mataora wreck: An Artificial reef that was put down in 1990. However, cyclones have laid her flat and she is now a collection of metal plates. However, there are still large parts of the ship which are smothered in coral and static life and shrouded in all sorts of fish life.



Land Temp. (°C)



Water temp. °C

1

2

3

11

12

13

5

6

7

8

9

10



- |                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1 Banks Islands | 12 Pentecost |
| 2 Vanua Lava    | 13 Ambrym    |
| 3 Santa Maria   |              |
| 4 Luganville    |              |
| 5 Lamap         |              |
| 6 Epi           |              |
| 7 Port-Vila     |              |
| 8 Potnarin      |              |
| 9 Tanna         |              |
| 10 Anatom       |              |
| 11 Maewo        |              |

**How to get there** → There are several possibilities, none particularly complex, but all quite long. Air Vanuatu flies from Auckland, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Noumea and Nad. Air Pacific has connections through Japan and New Zealand and Solomon Airlines connects goes from Several Asian centres via Port Moresby.

The international airport is Bauerfield, Port Vila on the island of Efate.

**Entry requirements** → Nationals of commonwealth countries don't need a visa for stays of less than 30 days. There is a departure tax to pay, which at the time of writing was 2000 Vatu (about £10-12).

**Climate** → Although in the Tropics, Vanuatu experiences two distinct seasons. The 'cool' season, where temperatures between the mid to high 20s centigrade are common, runs from April through November. Humidity is low and the climate is pleasant. The 'hot' season, from December through March, sees temperatures in the 30s centigrade and high humidity.

**Inoculations required** → Anti-malaria's are a must, and consult your GP for the current recommendations.

**Language** → English is commonly spoken although Bislama is the main mother tongue. There are however, some 115 other mother tongues in common use.

**Currency** → The official currency is the Vatu, although Australian Dollars are quite widely accepted.

## The country

Vanuatu is a chain of 83 islands in a Y formation flanking eastern rim of the Coral Sea some 2500km Northeast of Sydney, 2000km north of Auckland and 80km west of Fiji. The islands are a jumbled mix of old volcanoes topped in rainforest and low lying coral islands with superb beaches.

Vanuatu means Eternal Land in Bislama, the mother tongue of the islanders, who since populating the islands have developed into 115 distinct cultures. The main island of Efate is pretty much central, although it isn't the largest – that accolade falls to Espiritu Santo to the north.

Until 1980 the nation of Vanuatu didn't exist. It was known as the New Hebrides and jointly by the British and French.

Yet the change of name hasn't changed the pace of life. Everything happens to a set pace here – slow. There is no cause for rush and no need for panic among the islander's and visitors alike.

# Vanuatu

The archipelago of Vanuatu was first discovered in 1605 by Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernandez de Quiros, who thought he had discovered the fabled southern continent (Australia). Our own Captain Cook came next nearly 170 years later and extensively mapped the islands and gave them the name New Hebrides.

All visitors arrive at the International airport just outside the Capital Port Vila on Efate Island many stay here for a few days. Yet most diving visitors only use Port Vila as an acclimatisation stop on their way to Espiritu Santo, where you find the wreck of the SS President Coolidge.

Yet there is much to admire on Efate and there is also some excellent diving as well. Port Vila is very much like any other South Pacific capital with constant street markets selling local produce, Japanese cars ploughing the basic roads and satellite dishes perched on many of the modern houses.

Outside the centre the island is covered in forests, so furnished with beautiful waterfalls and fringed with mangrove stands and some pretty beaches.

Other Islands in the chain worthy of note include Tanna, about a 55 minute flight in a small twin engine plane south from Efate. Here you, like Cook, will find the extremely active Yasur Volcano. The volcano is in the south-eastern corner of the island, and has covered the countryside in so much ash that even four kilometres from the volcano the trees are up to their foliage. The 'viewing area' is right next to the active part of the volcano and every so often it explodes with a roar and sends ash and rocks into the sky.

Of course the main draw for divers is the Island of Espiritu Santo where the wreck of the Coolidge lies. Here in the tropical forest visitors find old WWI Dakotas and Quonset huts slowly being eaten up by the advancing greenery. The jungle on Santo is thick and home to many small tribes who are all friendly and will always try to sell you some wares.

## The diving

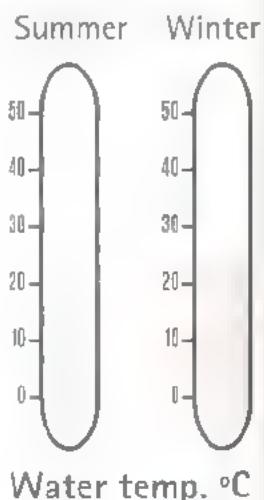
There aren't many divers who visit Vanuatu and do not see Espiritu Santo, or more precisely the wreck of the SS President Coolidge reputed to be the world's largest accessible war wreck. She lies fully intact all 200 metres of her, right next to the shore and extends from 21m down to 70m.

Her holds, which lie in 40m are still full of the 10,000 tons of equipment and supplies such as trucks, jeeps, field guns, artillery guns and ammunition of various calibre.

Perhaps the most awe-inspiring sight on the wreck is The Lady – a ceramic figurine sitting on a horse (it was once a unicorn) above the fireplace in the first class smoking lounge. Her colour has not faded and thankfully she has not been stolen. The next thing every diver wants to see for some reason is the toilets, which were placed in three rows on the promenade deck for all the troops.

Yet, although the President Coolidge is the reason most divers come to Vanuatu, it's not its only attraction. Again on Espiritu Santo there is a site known as Million Dollar Point which was a dump for surplus US Army equipment after the war. Here divers find stuff from hundreds of drinks bottles to planes, jeeps and bulldozers.

Elsewhere in Vanuatu is a mixture of classic Pacific reefs, bommies and walls both flanked by shoals of pelagics as well as several other war wrecks such as the Star of Russia and the USS Tucker. There are some interesting natural sites that are well worth a visit the best being the Cathedral, a large cavern which has several land lock chasms in which you can surface.



Many of the dives in Vanuatu are quite deep, with only the coral reefs the exceptions, so be prepared. Actually diving off Efate is a good way to warm up to the deeper stuff. Visibility is generally very good, although is better outside the many natural Harbours. At Hat Island, for example, it is regularly 40 metres.

Life wise you'll get to see all the usual tropical Pacific stuff including reef fish, pelagic jacks, the odd shark and, if you are lucky, a dugong.

As for dive facilities, well you are quite spoiled for choice. There are dive centres at several resorts and a few stand alone dive centres taking divers around Efate and Santo. All are well run operations catering mainly for the Australian and New Zealand markets, but all are pleased to see Brits as well.

## Dive Centres



**Bilikiki Cruises Ltd**  
PO Box 5693,  
Victoria, BC V8R 6SA,  
Canada  
Tel: 001 250 383 7253  
Fax: 001 250 383 6598  
E-mail:  
[bilkik@horizon.be.ca](mailto:bilkik@horizon.be.ca)  
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**Cook Island Divers**  
PO Box 1002, Taveuni,  
Vanuatu, Cook Islands  
Tel: 00 682 22 483  
Fax: 00 682 22 485  
E-mail: [gwilson@cdi-divers.co.uk](mailto:gwilson@cdi-divers.co.uk)

PADI, NAJI, SSI CMAS  
Training, R6 Feralls, tours,  
camera hire, equipment  
servicing, Rarotonga's  
internationally registered  
dive operator.

**Diversion Dive Travel &  
Training**  
PO Box 7026  
Cairns 4870  
Australia  
Tel: 00 61 7 40 390 200  
Fax: 00 61 7 40 390 300  
E-mail:  
[info@diversionOZ.com](mailto:info@diversionOZ.com)  
Web site:  
<http://www.diversionOZ.com>  
PADI, NAJI n, SSI, BSAC,  
CMAS  
All common affiliations  
are accepted in Australia,  
Papua New Guinea and  
Solomon Islands. The  
local experts for dive  
holidays in Australia,  
Papua New Guinea and  
the Solomons. All info  
and prices on the  
webpage or use their 24  
hour answer service via  
e-mail or fax.

**Paihia Dive & Fishing**  
PO Box 210, Williams  
Road,  
Paihia Bay of Islands,  
New Zealand  
Tel 0064 9 4027551  
Fax 0064 9 4027110  
E-mail:  
[t.m.barker@ntracdnz.co.nz](mailto:t.m.barker@ntracdnz.co.nz)

Web site:  
[www.divenz.com](http://www.divenz.com)  
PADI  
Dive charters to the  
famous Rainbow Warrior  
wreck and beautiful Bay  
of Islands, PADI dive  
school, full hire equipment  
rental, Dacor retail sales  
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crew

**Pro Dive Cairns**  
116 Spence Street, Cairns  
Queensland Australia  
Tel: 0061 7 40315255  
Fax: 0061 7 40519955  
E-mail:  
[prodive@internorth.com.au](mailto:prodive@internorth.com.au)  
PADI  
Pro Dive's Cairn's leading  
and most respected total

dive centre. Catering for  
beginners wanting to  
earn to dive to  
experienced divers  
wanting spectacular  
diving on Australia's Great  
Barrier Reef



**Tusa Dive**  
Cnr The Esplanade &  
Aplin Street, Cairns,  
Queensland, Australia  
4870  
Tel: 0061 7 4031 1248  
Fax: 0061 7 4031 5221  
E-mail:  
[tusa@c130.aone.net.au](mailto:tusa@c130.aone.net.au)  
Web site:  
<http://www.tusadive.com>  
PADI, NAUI  
Day dive & snorkel trips to  
the outer Great Barrier  
Reef Nitrox diving &  
courses. Also specialising  
in custom dive charters to  
the GBR/Coral Sea.

## Tour Operators

**DiveQuest**  
- 01254 826322  
**Diving World**  
- 0171 407 0019

**Harris Holidays**  
- 01375 396688  
**Hayes & Jarvis**  
0181 222 7840

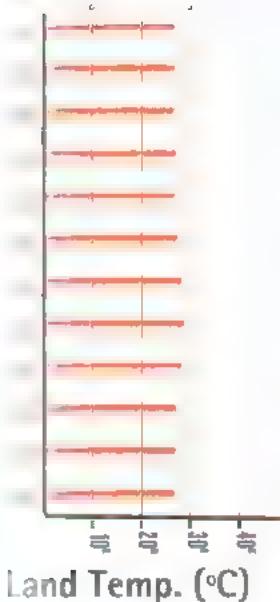
**Sport Abroad**  
- 01306 744345

**Sure Dive**  
- 01704 573714

# Caribbean



- 1 *Shoal Bay*
- 2 *Sea Feathers Bay*
- 3 *Sandy Ground*
- 4 *Meads Bay*
- 5 *West End Bay*
- 6 *Cove Bay*
- 7 *Shaddick Point*
- 8 *Little Harbour*
- 9 *Cul de Sac Bay*



**How to get there** ➤ Anguilla is reached from either Antigua or several US locations. Try BIWA, LIAT or American Eagle

**Entry requirements** ➤ For the most part British citizens require only a passport.

**Climate** ➤ Anguilla is warm and sunny for much of the year. There is a hurricane season when there is a small chance of being hit by a storm.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None

**Language** ➤ English

**Currency** ➤ The Eastern Caribbean dollar which is fixed to the US dollar and both are accepted island-wide.

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Anguilla Tourist Board Windotel, 3 Epirus Road, Fulham, London SW6 7UJ. Tel 0171 937 7725, fax 0171 938 4793.



## The country

Anguilla is the most northerly of the Leeward islands and at 15 miles long and three miles wide is one of the most low-lying of the chain. It is ringed by 12 miles of sandy beach and has a lush interior full of tropical flora and

# Anguilla



fauna. One of the island's most treasured natural wonders is its salt ponds, used in the early part of the century for sea salt production, but are now a natural oasis for all sorts of tropical birds and animals.

The island is keen to teach visitors about its human history and the underground cavern at Shoal Bay, known as the Founta n, is a natural museum to ancient inhabitants of the islands.

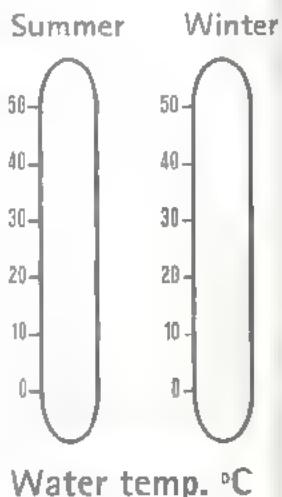
Anguilla holds a carnival during the first week of August where the whole island comes alive in a burst of colour, music and dancing. During the rest of the year Anguilla is a quiet island with a most agreeable climate and plenty to see and do.

## The diving

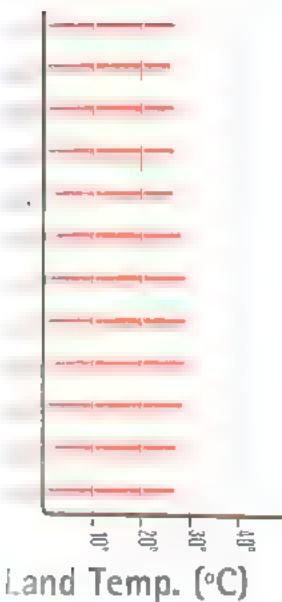
There are seven wrecks around Anguilla, some natural, some artificial, but all combine to give the visiting diver a wonderful experience and what's more they are all sitting upright on the bottom at various depths. This fact alone gives Anguilla a deserved reputation for being a great wreck diving destination. However that doesn't include the many excellent reef dive sites full of hard corals, sea fans and plentiful marine life. Like many other Caribbean islands the fish around Anguilla aren't huge (except for several sites with big drop offs), but there's an inexhaustible supply. One of the things assisting the marine environment is marine park status which prevents the use of jet skis and makes damaging coral illegal.

Some of the most popular sites include: Sandy Island, a shallow reef noted for its seafans and rare soft corals; Sandy Deep, surprisingly even shallower, but offering a coral encrusted wall and plenty of fish; Author's Deep, a deep dive noted for its black coral formations and large pelagics; Frenchman's Reef, a boulder strewn cliff bottom great for underwater photographers and novices; and Prickly Pear, a site renowned for its ledges, small crevices and nurse sharks.

There are two dive centres on the island, so sites are never crowded and both offer good service and PADI instruction.



- 1 Cedar Grove
- 2 St. John's
- 3 All Saints
- 4 Bolans
- 5 Boggy Peak
- 6 Old Road
- 7 Falmouth
- 8 Freetown
- 9 Seaton's



**How to get there** ➔ Antigua has an international airport. British Airways, Britannia and BIWA all fly here.

**Entry requirements** ➔ British citizens require only a passport.

**Climate** ➔ Antigua is warm and sunny for much of the year. Our summer is hurricane season when there is a small chance of being hit by a storm.

**Inoculations required** ➔ None

**Language** ➔ English is the main language.

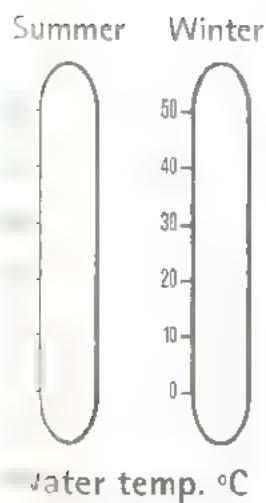
**Currency** ➔ The Eastern Caribbean dollar, which is fixed to the US dollar.

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Antigua and Barbuda Tourist Office, 15 Thayer Street London W1M 5LD. Tel 0171 486 7073

## The country

Antigua is the largest island in the British Leeward chain and is considered one of the Lesser Antilles. It is the site of the international airport in the area and is therefore a very popular Caribbean holiday destination. Antigua is on the wedding and inclusive resort circuit and has some very modern facilities. But it also has old world charm. It is an independent island within the Commonwealth and is volcanic in origin.

The nation of Antigua also includes the island Barbuda and the small island of Redonda in its territory. Barbuda is to the north of Antigua and quite different in appearance since it is a low-lying coral island. Redonda is a nature preserve and is uninhabited.



## The diving

Both Antigua and Barbuda are completely surrounded by coral reefs. There are some very good dive sites and several outstanding wrecks sites including several ancient wooden Men of War. Antigua has the most dive operations and therefore the most dive sites, but that's only because Barbuda is still largely unexplored underwater, although its waters are said to contain many wreck sites.

The wreck of the *Andes*, a three-masted merchant ship downed in 1905, is a popular site and it lies in less than 10m of water. For deeper excursions you should try Sunken Rock and for a little more excitement there is Horseshoe Reef, an offshore formation which is reputed to house many ancient shipwrecks.

# Aruba

- 1 *Arashi Bay*
- 2 *Antilla*
- 3 *Pedernalis*
- 4 *Oranjestad*
- 5 *Pilot Boat*
- 6 *Jane Sea*



**How to get there** ➤ The easiest route is with KLM which flies to Queen Beatrix Airport, Oranjestad, from Amsterdam. Alternatively Air Aruba and American Airlines fly from the main New York and Florida airports.

**Entry requirements** ➤ A valid passport and visa. A departure tax is payable.

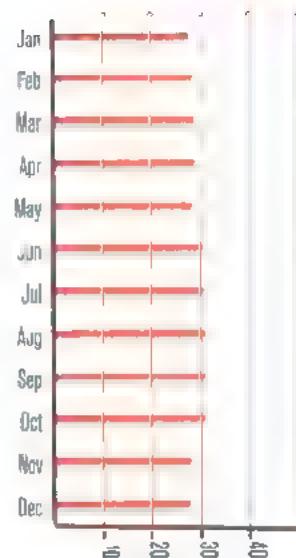
**Climate** ➤ Like its neighbours, Aruba is warm and sunny just about all year round, although the almost constant trade winds keep the temperature down slightly.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None

**Language** ➤ Creole is spoken by locals, but most also speak English.

**Currency** ➤ The local legal tender is the Aruban florin, but the US dollar and credit cards are widely accepted.

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Aruba Tourism Authority, Schimmel penninck aan 1, 2517 JN, The Hague, The Netherlands Tel 0070 356 6220.



Land Temp. (°C)

## The country

Aruba is the smallest of the Netherlands Antilles. It lies 18 miles off the coast of Venezuela and 42 miles west of Curacao. At 70 square miles, the country is a mixture of rugged beauty, sandy coves and clean, clear water. Tourists are

the backbone of the island's economy and, therefore, are extremely welcome. About 540,000 visitors arrive here every year (although thankfully not all at the same time) and a lot go back year after year.

In trying to keep all the visitors happy all of the time, Aruba has developed a strange mix of fast-paced activities such as night clubs and casinos and more peaceful pursuits such as bird-watching, hiking and chilling out in the national parks.

Sports enthusiasts are well catered for with windsurfing, sailing and diving for the more aquatic and golf, horse-riding and bowling for those who prefer dry land.

The locals are of a mixed descent which shows in the wide range of facial features, but all are friendly and obviously know the true power of the tourist dollar.

## The diving

Most of the diving is concentrated on Aruba's sheltered western shoreline. The trade winds make diving on the exposed side a bit of a rough affair and most divers want peace and tranquillity - not a bumpy ride.

In a bid to protect its reef, the Aruban authorities are installing mooring buoys at the most popular sites, and initiating reef clean up schemes, as well as setting up a marine park offering protection both to the reef and its inhabitants.

There are about 42 dive sites off the island and they include various wrecks, several reefs and a couple of walls.

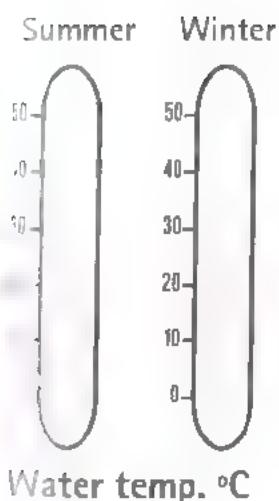
The most historically interesting is the wreck of the *California*. She now lies in 10-15m of water surrounded by large coral formations, but on the night of April 14 1912 she was in the north Atlantic near to the most luxurious ocean liner in the world - the *RMS Titanic* - with her radio shut down. As the *Titanic* died and sunk, the crew of *California*, who were badly criticised after the event, were going about their business in ignorance of the human tragedy unfolding a few miles away.

Another interesting wreck is the *Pedernales Wreck*, again quite shallow in just over 10m. The *Pedernales* was a oil tanker that was torpedoed by a German U-boat during WWII. The wreck is actually only the centre of the wreck as the bow and stern were cut away by US Navy divers, taken to the US, welded together and shipped to the UK for use in the Normandy landings.

Other interesting wrecks include the Tugboat Wreck, *Antilla Wreck*, *Rum Runner Wreck* and the *Jane Sea freighter* wreck.

The best reefs are Santana Reef, Natural Bridge, Baby Beach Reef, Cabez Reef, Commendeurs Reef, Lago Reef and Porto Chiquito.

The diving facilities here are good and as they cater mainly for the demands of US divers, they are slick and well run operations.



# Bahamas

- |                    |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Grand Bahama     | 12 San Salvador         |
| 2 Great Abaco I.   | 13 Rum Cay              |
| 3 Andros Island    | 14 Sandy Cay            |
| 4 Nassau           | 15 Mayaguana I.         |
| 5 Eleuthera        | 16 Atwood or Samana Cay |
| 6 Cat I.           | 17 Bimini Is            |
| 7 Long I.          |                         |
| 8 Crooked I.       |                         |
| 9 Acklins I.       |                         |
| 10 Great Inagua I. |                         |
| 11 Great Exuma I.  |                         |



**How to get there** ➤ You can reach the main airport at Nassau directly from London Gatwick with British Airways. Alternatively you can fly to Miami and change there. Reaching other islands is a question of either a smaller plane journey or a boat ride (depending on the distance).

**Entry requirements** ➤ For visits of less than three weeks, UK citizens need only a valid passport.

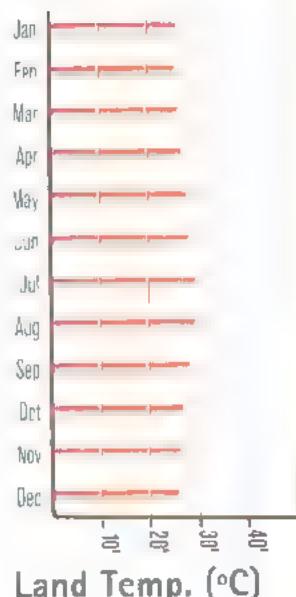
**Climate** ➤ The Bahamas straddle the Tropic of Cancer and so the northern part is considered sub tropical while the south is considered tropical. Generally, the islands have a good climate year round.

**Inoculations** ➤ None required

**Language** ➤ English

**Currency** ➤ The Bahamian dollar is the main currency although it is linked to the US dollar and both are readily accepted throughout the islands.

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Bahamas Tourist Office, 3 The Billings, Walnut Tree Close, Guildford GU1 4UL. Tel 01483 448900, fax 01483 448990.



## The country

The Bahamas is a string of islands some small, some even smaller, but all beautifully formed. Diving is one of the mainstays of the islands' economy and so everyone makes divers most welcome.

The main island is Grand Bahama Island, where you will find Freeport, a city with an incredible array of shops, casinos and hotels catering for the rich and famous who come to bathe themselves in the sun that drapes itself over the islands, the beaches and the water.

Being under an hour away from the mainland United States, The Bahamas have become a popular haunt for the American diver, but the islands' British



l roots are still evident.

Getting around is a case of island hopping either by boat or by plane. There is a frequent and reliable service by Bahamas Air and there are several boat services operating between various islands.

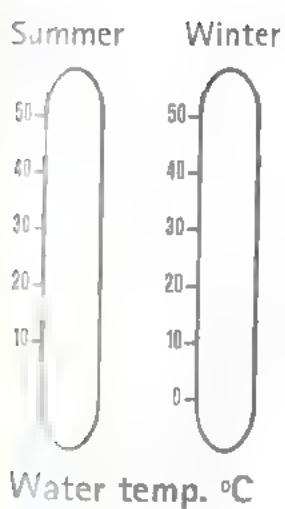
There are a total of 700 islands in the chain and only a handful are inhabited. The rest are a collection of Robinson Crusoe-like sand protrusions from the perpetual blue of the sea. The total area of the Bahamas is about 100,000 square miles and they are bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in the north and the Caribbean in the south.

The Bahamas prides itself on having everything for everyone. Because each island has developed its own character you can find either fun and frolics or peace and tranquillity. The Bahamas has marketed this concept well and has created a wonderful holiday destination for just about every taste.

As well as a diverse range of activities for visitors, the islands also have a wide range of habitats for their wildlife. There is every sort of habitat from pine forests on Grand Bahama and Abaco in the north to the arid salt-pans of Inagua in the south. In between you have lush forests, wetlands and tropical beaches.

The islands themselves are quite low lying and the highest point is Mount Alvernia on Cat Island, which is only 60m above sea level. In some places you can wade between some of the islands because the water is so shallow. However, a five mile deep trench, the Tongue of the Ocean, runs between Andros and the Exumas Islands – so it is more advisable to take a boat or plane here.

The Bahamas gained independence from Britain in 1973 but remains a member of the Commonwealth



## The diving

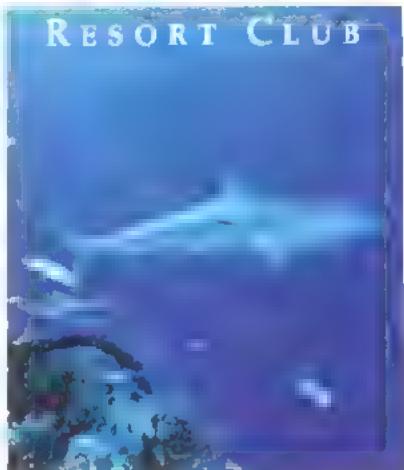
Often referred to as world class, the Bahamas offers the diver almost every possible type of diving – apart from ice diving, of course. There are classic coral reefs, walls, shark dives, dolphins – both tame and wild – wrecks, caverns and even blue holes. Add all this to superb underwater visibility and warm water and you have a diver's paradise. Diving facilities include a host of land-based centres and a number of liveaboards, which tend to be large and cater mainly for the American market, although there



**Aaaaahhh...Bahamas!**



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by E Mail [smrc@stellamarisresort.com](mailto:smrc@stellamarisresort.com)

by Web - [www.stellamarisresort.com](http://www.stellamarisresort.com)

LONG ISLAND BAHAMAS

are exceptions.

There are a host of dive operators spread throughout the islands. Many are very well established with over 10, 20 or even 30 years experience of Bahama waters. And many of the dive sites are well known, so you can relax in the knowledge that your dive guide is intimate with any dive he/she takes you on.

There are a host of dive sites and several very specific to the Bahamas. For wreck enthusiasts, for example, there are a number of ship wrecks as well as several artificial reefs. The most popular wrecks include the James Bond film wrecks (the Vulcan bomber from Thunderball and the Tears of Allah from Never Say Never Again); Theo's Wreck, a freighter sunk to create an artificial reef; and the Eleuthera train wreck which is an unusual wreck of a steam train and railroad tracks from the American Civil War - apparently it slid off a barge.

There are many other wrecks scattered around the islands which make a wreck tour of the Bahamas both interesting and exciting.

For nature lovers there are hundreds of



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**PO Box 333, Bonaire,**

**Netherlands Antilles**

**Tel: (599-7) 8291 Fax: (599-7) 4870**

**Email: [sunset@bonairenet.com](mailto:sunset@bonairenet.com)**

dive sites over coral walls and reefs where you can experience large groupers, turtles, huge sponges, a myriad of reef fish and sharks. These days, many of the islands' dive centres are running special shark dives, which involve shark feeds. One of the best is run by Walkers Cay Dive Centre on Walkers Cay island. Here a large lump of frozen fish heads called a chumsickle is anchored to the bottom and divers get to watch Caribbean grey reef sharks, nurse sharks and the occasional bull shark tear it to shreds.

The most famous dives represent the most popular areas of the Bahamas, but there are also undiscovered oases still to be found. Diving in these spots is calm, yet adventurous. The fish don't all have names and the coral is still pristine. The walls are still adorned with huge, yet delicate sea fans which are lacking at many other sites in the nation. However, many of the more established dive centres are looking at new ways to entice older customers back. Walker's Cay, again, is offering underwater scooter courses to allow a diver to glide along the edge of the tongue of the Ocean and several dive centres are now offering rebreather courses and rebreather hire (for those who have passed the course).

If you want to experience dolphins in the wild, then opt for a liveaboard out to the Bahama Banks, or more precisely, White Sand Ridge, where a pod of spotted dolphins spends its days. This is where most of the dolphin images which feature on posters and cards are captured by the world's best underwater photographers. Alternatively there are some semi-wild dolphins at UNEXO.

A break from coral reefs and wrecks include blue holes, the most famous of which lies about 10 miles east of Nassau. This hole in the white sand sea floor starts just 15m down and is over 30m in diameter. It is surrounded by coral heads which perch precariously to the edge and support an amazing array of marine life. Inside, the hole opens out and is simply one hell of a dive experience.

There are plenty of diving facilities to choose from in the Bahamas, including shore based dive centres, schools and luxury liveaboards. All are featured in the excellent Bahamas Diving Guide which is produced and available from the Bahamas Tourist Office. This not only gives you information about the centres, but also details of many of the dives, too.



- 1 Washington-Slagbaai National Park
- 2 Rincon
- 3 Goto Meer
- 4 Klein Bonaire
- 5 Kralendijk
- 6 Lac Bay
- 7 Solar Salt Works



**How to get there** → There are a number of options for getting to Bonaire, but none start in Britain. You can catch a KLM flight from Amsterdam to Curacao, Bonaire's neighbour, where you connect or you can change flights in New York, Atlanta or Miami.

**Entry requirements** → A full passport is required as well as a confirmed room reservation for a stay of up to three months.

**Climate** → Bonaire is in the southern Caribbean near to Venezuela and Mexico and as such has a very dry, hot, arid climate. There is very little rainfall, but plenty of sunshine.

**Inoculations required** → None.

**Language** → English is spoken by most Bonairians, but a strange mixture of languages called papiamento is the local tongue.

**Currency** → The local legal tender is the Antilles florin, but the US dollar and credit cards are widely accepted in resorts, hotels and some shops.

**Tourist Authority** → Bonaire Tourist Office, Visseringlaan 24, 2288 ER Rijswijk, The Netherlands. Tel 0031 70 3954444.

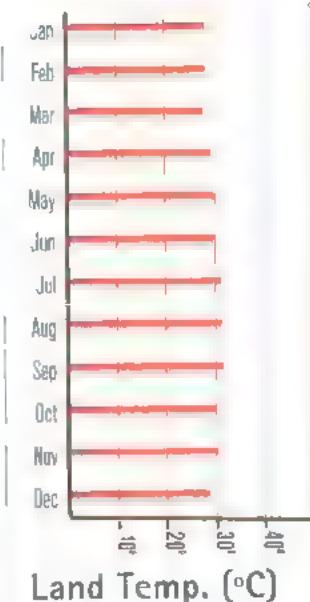
## The country

Bonaire is the easternmost island in the Dutch Antilles. Many think it is located in the Windward chain but it is, in fact, nearer Venezuela than the outer Caribbean Islands.

The island is roughly 30 miles long, three to seven miles wide and covers 112 square miles. The capital, Kralendijk, is located towards the middle of the island, and a smaller island, Klein Bonaire, sits just off the west coast, out from Kralendijk.

The island was discovered by Europeans when Amerigo Vespucci made landfall in 1499. Until then, the Arawak Indians had lived there in relative peace. The island's name is actually derived from the Arawak Bonnah or Lowland.

From here on, the story is very similar to that of many other Caribbean islands. The European countries fought over ownership and the main players were the Dutch, the Spanish and the British who all wanted a stake in the island's resources. It has been used for salt production, livestock breeding and commercial crop growing throughout the years and has been owned for a time by all three nations, although in 1816 the Dutch finally gained



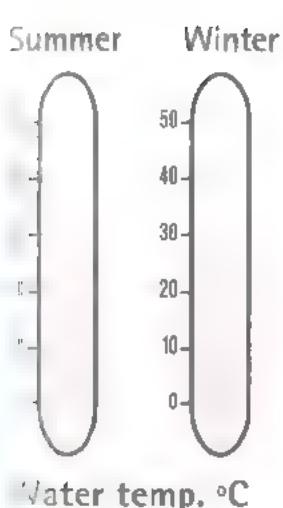
control.

Now the island's main source of income comes from a combination of tourism and the oil industry.

As nations go, Bonaire is extremely environmentally conscious and has a progressive commitment to protecting its natural resources both on land and underwater. In fact, Bonaire was the first of the Netherlands Antilles to create a national park. The Washington-Slagbaai National Park covers 5.46 hectares on the island's northern tip and is home to 190 different species of birds.

In addition to this, all the waters around Bonaire are designated as a marine park and are policed and managed to keep the reefs in as good condition as possible. This even includes closing some sites when they become damaged.

The island is very modern, but also very traditional. There are a number of very good and well established resorts and hotels and a good collection of dive centres. As well as diving, tourists can take part in a host of other activities from hiking, to horse-riding and flamingo watching to relaxing on the beach.



## The diving

With over 75 sites buoyed, the entire in-shore waters protected and hardly any land-water run off, the diving around Bonaire is absolutely beautiful, and strictly controlled.

Bonaire realised its natural resource potential long before most other countries knew they had one and began to protect it. As early as 1961, the Bonaire government was passing laws to protect its turtle population and their eggs. In 1971 it banned spear fishing and in 1975 it became illegal to break coral. The culmination of the protection efforts came in 1979 with the introduction of the marine park. All this means the waters are teeming with life and the reefs are in a very good state of preservation. Marine park rules prevent anchoring, spear-fishing, collecting anything underwater, handling the animals and any reef damage. About 2700 hectares are protected, around the entire island, leaving just a small part outside the main town, which is used for anchoring at the moment, but that too is due to change.

Another benefit of Bonaire diving is its accessibility. The reefs start close to the shore, making long boat journeys almost obsolete. The main reef is nearer to shore in the north – here it can be a mere 20m from the waterline. It is further in the south (as much as 200m), making this the area of choice for



# Bonaire

snorkellers. You can either use the services of a dive centre to show you the sites, or you can hire what you need, jump in a rental car and head off. All the shore sites are marked and easy to find.

Most of the diving is along the western side of the island, which is protected from the prevailing easterly trade winds, although there are a couple of dives on the east and several along the north coast within the boundaries of the national park.

An annual dive fee of \$10 is levied by the Netherlands Antilles National Parks Foundation (STINAPA), a non-governmental, non-profit making organisation which polices and protects the park, installs and maintains the buoys and sets the park rules. A dive ticket is available from dive centres or the park headquarters. Unlike many other marine park authorities, STINAPA closes sites so they can recover if they feel the coral is becoming damaged.

There are also several sections of coastline that are fully protected and no diving is permitted there.

Of all the fantastic reefs with their large and well preserved corals and sponges, it is strange that Bonaire's most famous dive site is actually the pier in Kralendijk. You need permission from the harbour master to dive it, but it is worthwhile, especially if you are a macro photographer. Under the pier, divers find seahorses, frogfish and enough encrusting life to completely engulf the original structure of the pier – it also makes an excellent night dive.

Another good site, with an incredible tale is the ex-drug running vessel, the *Hilma Hooker*, which sank in 1984 after it was busted. She now lies in 29m of water on her side and makes a very good dive, with a profusion of life

setting up home in Bonaire.

If you fancy taking the ten minute boat ride to Bonaire Klein you will be in for a treat. The majority of divers come here for the convenient shore diving and so the outer island isn't as busy. It offers some excellent reef systems and the best wall dives in Bonaire.

When diving you'll be greeted by a number of unusual sights – barrel sponges bigger than a human-being, frog fish and seahorses (if you have a sharp eye), shoals of snapper, angelfish and the pelagic hunters. In short, life in profusion.

**BONAIRE**  
DIVING

is a world-class PADI/NAUI certified dive operator, located on the beach at the only true luxury resort on the island of Bonaire. It offers a great value dive package combining the ultimate in Bonaire's underwater experience with the amenities of a beach Resort which Harper's Bazaar cited as "among the world's 12 best".

Resort offers: 1/4 mile white sandy beach. Full service spa/fitness centre. 4 restaurants. Pools. 4 tennis courts. Marina and more.

Dive centre offers: 4 state-of-the-art dive boats. Laid-back and personalised service. Access to great 70' beach diving.

Reservations/Information: Tel. 305-567-9509. Fax. 305-567-9659. [www.harbourvillage.com](http://www.harbourvillage.com) email: [harbourvil@aol.com](mailto:harbourvil@aol.com)

UK Agents  
Harlequin: 01708 852780  
Journey Latin America: 011-44817473108  
Kuoni: 011-441306740888

1

2

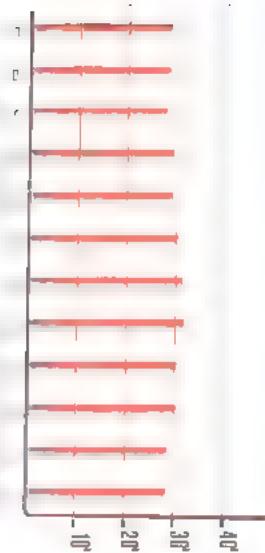


3

4

5

- 1 Mushroom Forest
- 2 Mike's Place
- 3 Willemstad
- 4 Baba wreck and reef
- 5 East Point



**How to get there** ➔ Curaçao is reached via Amsterdam with Dutch carrier KLM.

**Entry requirements** ➔ British citizens require only a passport and a return ticket.

**Climate** ➔ Curaçao has a tropical climate and stays warm year round. Being so far south it is quite dry and very little rain falls here.

**Inoculations required** ➔ None.

**Language** ➔ Dutch is the official language, although locals speak a mixture of Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and English called papiamento. English is widely spoken in the resorts and shops in tourist areas.

**Currency** ➔ The Netherlands Antilles florin is official tender, although the US dollar is widely accepted.

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Curaçao Tourism Development Bureau, 421a Finchley Road, London NW3 6HJ. Tel 0171 431 4045

## The country

Curaçao is the middle and largest island in the three that make up the Netherlands Antilles – Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. The island is a mere 35 miles north of Venezuela and 42 miles east of Aruba. It has a total of 38 beaches for visitors to enjoy, although none is a great expanse of sand.

The island is one of the most southerly islands in the Caribbean and is protected from the wet weather by the Windward and Leeward Island chains and is, therefore, quite arid.

Just to the east is Piccola Curaçao or Little Curaçao, which is a small uninhabited island about a mile long by half a mile wide. A lighthouse stands on the island, but that is about it.

Curaçao's capital is Willemstad and is a favourite cruise ship stop off. These huge ships anchor in the harbour and disgorge their passengers into this quite small town and so, on days when cruise ships are in port, the streets and restaurants can become a little busy.

Tourism plays a very important role in the island's economy and so you are greeted with modern facilities and a wide range of accommodation. Most hotels are found on the calmer southern shore, which is always protected from the prevailing trade winds.

# Curaçao

## The diving

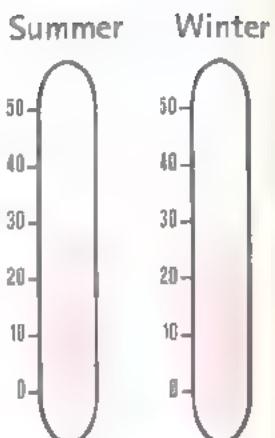
Like the other Dutch Antilles islands, Curaçao offers some spectacular diving. One of the best areas to dive is the reef around Little Curaçao. The reef is remarkably well looked after, which can be seen immediately from the intact and beautiful sea fans. There are also plenty of shipwreck sites on this reef too, because before the lighthouse, ships didn't stand a chance against the rocky shore. Some of the shipwrecks are no longer in existence, but their metal parts have survived and in the small lagoon there is something of an anchor and chain feast going on (although these did not necessarily come from shipwrecks).

All of the diving on Curaçao takes place on the leeward shore because of the trade winds. The island has over 100 listed dive sites off its coast and, in order to protect its reefs, most a third of the southern waters are designated a marine park. Mooring buoys are at all the major sites.

The diving itself is characterised by a shallow reef slope stretching out about 100m from the shore, which then drops quite sharply forming very pretty walls covered in coral. The fish life is good and large shoals of snapper are often seen. Other species seen include French and grey angelfish, spotted morays, groupers, jacks and turtles.



Like its smaller brother, Curaçao has several shipwrecks including the SS Orange Nassau and the Superior Producer SA. The wreckage of both is covered in life and now provides a home for many species.



Water temp. °C

## CAPTAIN DON'S HABITAT



Habitat is living its own legend. Incredible 24 hour shore diving is just 90 feet from Habitat's pier. Our world class reefs are lush, alive and thriving with sea life and our boats are uncrowded. Habitat is praised as a divers paradise by novices and experienced divers alike. Accommodations include your choice of oceanfront villas, rooms, junior suites and cottages. Overlooking our reefs, you'll relax and enjoy our oceanfront restaurant, bar, pool and beach.

Come experience the home of diving freedom  
<http://www.interknowledge.com/bonaire/habitat>

## HABITAT CURACAO

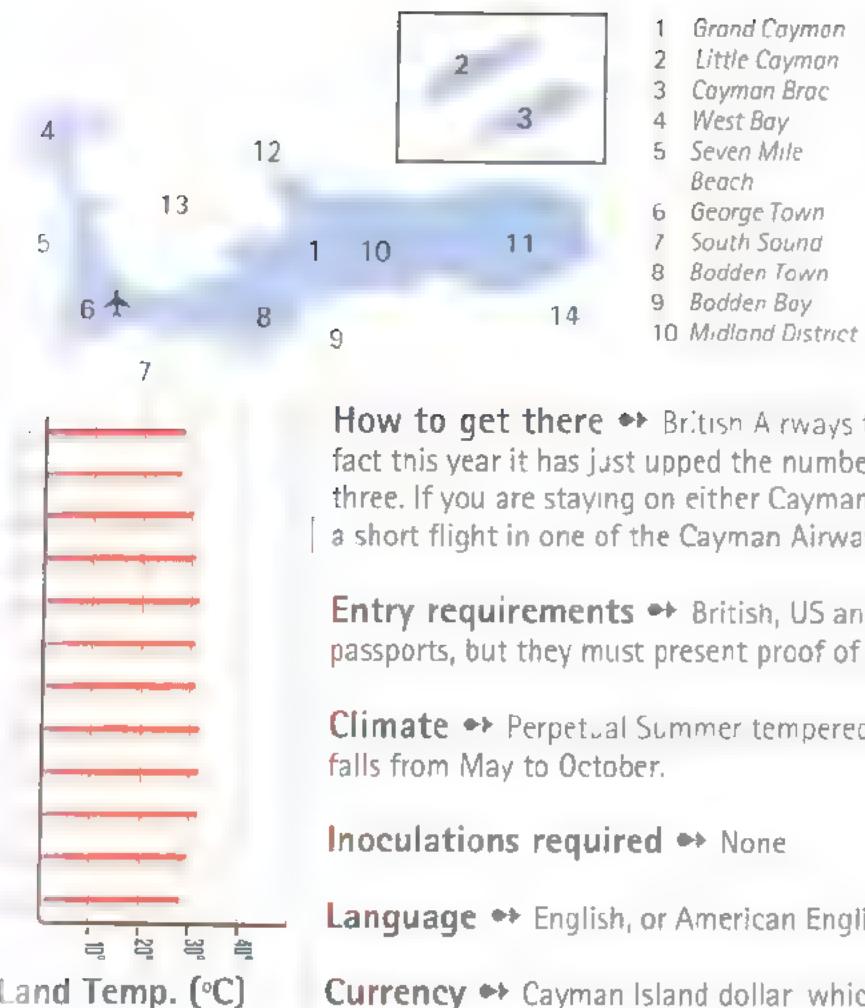


Located on the Southwest coast of Curacao, just minutes away from the best diving sites on the island. Habitat Curacao offers 56 oceanfront deluxe junior suites with kitchens, a multi-tiered restaurant and bar, swimming pool and its own shuttle. The dive operation is a PADI training and instructor development centre offering boat and beach dives daily and 24 hour unlimited shore diving. The premier dive resort of Curacao and the new home of diving freedom opened on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1996.

### UK Agents

Sport Abroad: 01306 744345  
The Barefoot Traveller: 0181 741 4319  
Harlequin: 01708 852780  
Explorers Tours: 01753 681999

# The Caymans



**How to get there** ➔ British Airways flies direct to the Grand Cayman. In fact this year it has just upped the number of flights from one a week to three. If you are staying on either Cayman Brac or Little Cayman you will take a short flight in one of the Cayman Airways island hoppers.

**Entry requirements** ➔ British, US and Canadian citizens do not require passports, but they must present proof of citizenship.

**Climate** ➔ Perpetual Summer tempered by cooling trade winds. Most rain falls from May to October.

**Inoculations required** ➔ None

**Language** ➔ English, or American English anyway, is the main language.

**Currency** ➔ Cayman Island dollar which is fixed to the US dollar.

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Department of Tourism, 6 Arlington Street, London SW1A 1RE. Tel 0171 491 7771, fax 0171 409 7773.

## The country

These three tiny islands have chosen to remain a British Dependent Territory and these days the Caymans almost exist for dive tourism, offshore banking and duty free shopping. In short, the Cayman islands are a holidaymakers' and bankers' heaven.

There are three islands in the group - Grand Cayman, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac. They actually lie within the shelter of the crescent-shaped Communist island of Cuba, but the lifestyles of the two countries could not possibly be more different.

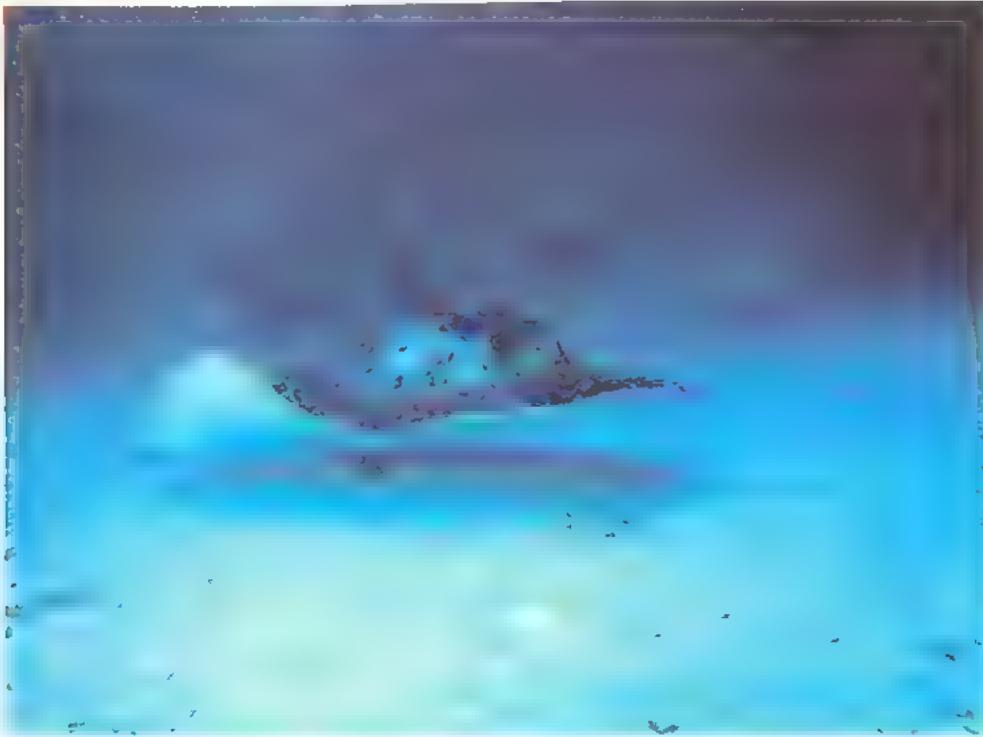
The biggest, and therefore, the main island is Grand Cayman which is 22 miles long and only eight miles wide. Its highest point is a mere 20 metres above sea level.



The capital, George Town, is home to many offshore banking houses and a large number of shops and hotels. About 24 000 companies theoretically operate from the Caymans, making it one of the world's biggest financial centres.

Little Cayman is about 85 miles to the east of Grand Cayman and is just

# The Caymans



one mile wide and only 10 miles long. There are only about 50 permanent residents on the entire island, although tourists boost that number hugely. Compared to its large brother, Little Cayman seems undeveloped and offers visitors the chance to enjoy a relaxing and quiet holiday, but with the sort of service that American visitors demand.

Cayman Brac is five miles from Little Cayman and is 12 miles long and two miles wide. It also has a laid-back lifestyle, but even fewer visitors. There are only two resorts on the island, a few local bars, but that's about it apart from beautiful beaches and a picturesque interior.

## The diving

The Americans use the Caymans much as the Europeans use the Red Sea. There are numerous dive sites around all three islands including several world famous names such as Stingray City, Bloody Bay Wall and Orange Canyon.

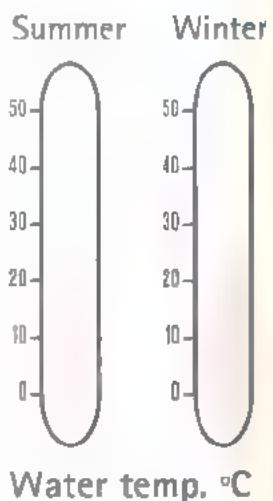
There are plenty of dive centres and each one, as you would expect, is run professionally and has to abide by a number of strict laws to protect the reef systems.

Wall diving is a speciality of the Caymans and Little Cayman is famed for its spectacular sheer coral covered faces.

Cayman Brac recently decided to entice more visitors by sinking an old Russian destroyer, which should, in a few years will be an attraction for both marine life and divers. And Grand Cayman is home to a world famous sandbank known as Stingray City.

Because there are no rivers emptying into the sea, the visibility is usually outstanding and the tough and highly policed conservation laws mean that the reefs have stayed in very good condition.

But because of the amount of diving that takes place here, many of the larger more intelligent creatures have become more like pets than wild creatures. Stingray City is a prime example. You can hand feed the southern stingrays here and at various other locations nearby, but don't expect the stingrays to act like fish. They have become more like pet cats. There are





groupers, too, who have become accustomed to humans.

Wreck diving here is also world-class, some wrecks, like the one off Cayman Brac, were put down deliberately, while others sunk by accident, and many have interesting histories.

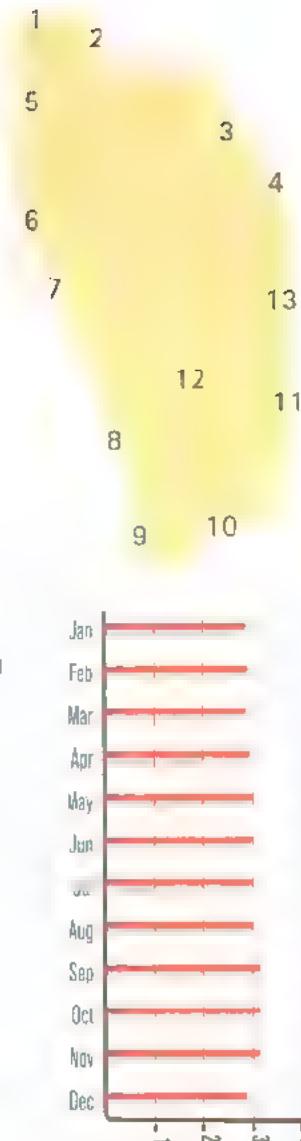
Many good reefs can be dived from shore. Repeat visitors tend to hire what gear they need plus a car and head off in search of sites reachable from shore. Many are in unusual places such as Cheeseburger Reef, which is located behind the Burger King in George Town.

There are many professional dive centres on the islands, although some can be a little too regimented for experienced and independent divers. Many though are now world renowned and are run or staffed by some of the top names in the dive industry.

You will be asked for qualifications and your diving experience, so ensure you have your log book and C-card, or qualification book with you, otherwise you may not be allowed on the boat – and quite rightly so! All internationally recognised diving qualifications are accepted here and everyone has to abide by the strict rules set down by the National Park authorities.

An advertisement for Hayes and Jarvis Diving Worldwide. At the top, the company name is written in a stylized font. Below it is a photograph of a woman in a bikini standing outdoors with palm trees in the background. A yellow rectangular box contains the company's name and logo, followed by the text "DIVING WORLDWIDE". At the bottom, there is a dark box with white text providing contact information: "Tel: 0181 748 5050", "Hayes &amp; Jarvis (Travel) Ltd.", "Hayes House, 152 King Street, London W6 0QU", and "www.hayes-jarvis.com".

- |                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1 <i>Cape Capucin</i> | 10 <i>Berekua</i>   |
| 2 <i>Vieille Case</i> | 11 <i>La Plaine</i> |
| 3 <i>Mariot</i>       | 12 <i>Loudet</i>    |
| 4 <i>Salibia</i>      | 13 <i>Rosolie</i>   |
| 5 <i>Portsmouth</i>   |                     |
| 6 <i>Colihaut</i>     |                     |
| 7 <i>Salisbury</i>    |                     |
| 8 <i>Roseau</i>       |                     |
| 9 <i>Scotts Head</i>  |                     |



**How to get there** ➔ First you get to Antigua, with either BA or BWIA and then connect with LIAT.

**Entry requirements** ➔ For the most part, British citizens require only a passport and a return or onward ticket. There is a departure tax of US\$12.

**Climate** ➔ Dominica's climate is warm and sunny for much of the year. There is a hurricane season when there is a chance of being hit by a storm.

**Inoculations required** ➔ None

**Language** ➔ English is the main tourist language, although the locals speak a patois.

**Currency** ➔ The Eastern Caribbean dollar, which is fixed to the US dollar

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Dominica Tourist Office, 1 Collingham Gardens, London SW5 0HW. Tel 0171 835 1937.

## The country

Dominica lies at the northern end of the Lesser Antilles chain and is sandwiched between Guadalupe and Martinique. The island is 29 miles long and 16 miles wide. From one look you can tell the island is volcanic in origin. Its high rugged mountains dominate the sky line and when you look a bit closer you find hot water springs, sulphur vents and a volcanic rock substrata. The mountains are covered in lush forest, veined by beautiful walks where all manner of tropical birds can be seen.

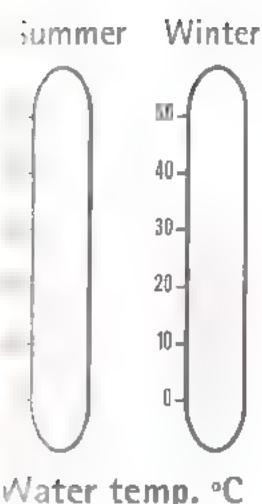
One of the biggest draws are the island's numerous waterfalls, which have become famous for their beauty. Several lie at the end of a fair walk, but some are quite close to the island's good road system, which does tend to make them the most popular. Check out sites such as Emerald Pool in the Morne Trois Piton National Park; Trafalgar Falls, five miles from Roseau up a steep, picturesque valley; Sari-Sari Falls, behind the village of La Plaine and Victoria Falls, one of the island's prettiest cascades.



Other places of note include the collapsed sulphur tubes at The Stinking Hole where bats make their home and the Sulphur Springs in the Valley of Desolation.

For the more water bound, you can always take a trip to see the island's populations of sperm whales. Whale watching trips have become quite common on the island and head out to see the whales, which live only about 3-5 miles offshore.

The winter is the best time to see the whales, but indications show they are present all year round.



## The diving

Dominica has a varied underwater seascape, which mirrors its topside attractions. That means as well as gullies, pinnacles and lush marine life there is also the attraction of underwater hot springs. These are found at the Soufriere Crater, a caldera sofa prehistoric volcano. This huge submerged crater is in Soufriere Bay and has several extremely interesting dive sites including Scotts Head Pinnacles, Soufriere Pinnacle and Point Guignard.

Virtually all the diving is done off the island's leeward side, but even so, a great deal is unexplored. The southern reaches are the popular spots leaving the north for the most part undived.

Marine life includes all the usual Caribbean life from huge barrel sponges to hordes of tropical reef fish. Wreck fanatics are catered for with the Tug wreck and wall diving fans have the 1.5 mile long La Bim Wall.

Although the underwater scenery is dramatic and the marine life quite impressive, Dominica still has something else up its sleeve – hot fresh water springs. A shallow site known as Champagne sees hot freshwater bubble up through the black volcanic sand to shimmer up through the sea like crystals. It makes a great night dive as it's only 5m or so deep.

Generally the diving is excellent off Dominica, but rains can and do swell rivers spoiling the usually excellent visibility and fishing practices have taken their toll on the larger fish. On the whole though, diving here is very good. The dive businesses too are well-run, efficient operations who look out for their charges and make everyone feel welcome.



# Grenada

- |                            |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 <i>Sauteurs</i>          | 12 <i>Westerhall</i>  |
| 2 <i>Victoria</i>          | 13 <i>Willis</i>      |
| 3 <i>Montreuil</i>         | 14 <i>Marquis</i>     |
| 4 <i>Tivoli</i>            | 15 <i>St. David's</i> |
| 5 <i>Couyave</i>           |                       |
| 6 <i>Grand Roy</i>         |                       |
| 7 <i>Woodford</i>          |                       |
| 8 <i>St. George's</i>      |                       |
| 9 <i>Belmont</i>           |                       |
| 10 <i>Grand Anse</i>       |                       |
| 11 <i>Lance aux Epines</i> |                       |



**How to get there** ➔ British Airways and BWIA fly direct from Gatwick

**Entry requirements** ➔ British citizens must have a full passport.

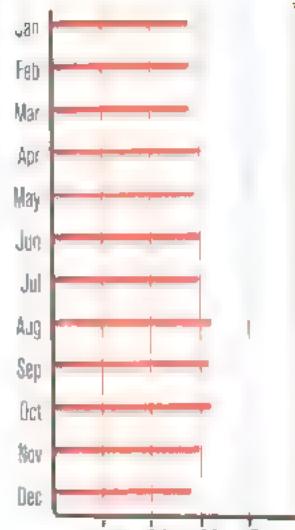
**Climate** ➔ The tropical climate is tempered slightly by cooling and constant trade winds. The dry season (the best time to visit) runs from January to May and it rains quite a lot the rest of the time, but it is still pleasantly warm.

**Inoculations required** ➔ None.

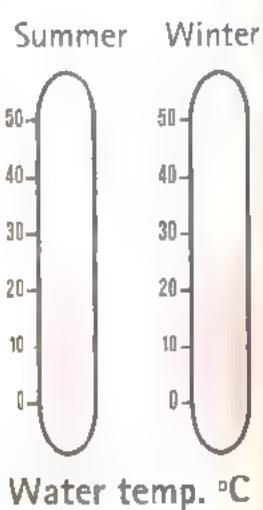
**Currency** ➔ East Caribbean Dollar

## The country

Grenada shot onto the world stage in October 1983 when the US decided to invade under the guise of stopping another Cuba being formed on its doorstep. The invasion, like many led by the US, was a disaster, but their worst fears were not realised and Grenada is now safely under elected



Land Temp. (°C)



Water temp. (°C)

governmental rule. However, the legacy of the troubles still lingers and tourism is still a minority industry behind farming and fishing (a rarity in the Windward Islands).

Grenada has been an independent state in the Commonwealth since 1974 and the nation includes Carriacou, Petit Martinique, and several islets of the Grenadine Islands.

However, the island is on the Cruise ship route and so it is not totally overlooked. It is a very pretty island with a good infrastructure and a warm and pleasant population.

St George's is the capital and the main centre for many industries. It is the home to the largest fruit and vegetable market on the island, which is well worth a look. Its harbour, The Carenage, is another popular spot and a very pretty one too. On the days cruise ships arrive there is very often a steel band playing, although as soon as the ship has docked make yourself scarce as hundreds of the checked-short brigade disembark and swamp the place.

Other popular areas include St Patrick's, home to the island's oldest Rum Distillery and Gouyave St. John's, the home of Grenada's fishing industry.

Local history seems very important to the Grenadians, although it is not always pleasant as the French did unspeakable things to the Caribs – Grenada's original inhabitants. This is brought home at Caribstone a site where 400 or so Caribs leapt to their deaths rather than surrender to a life as slaves. On a happy note, Caribstone was a place of worship and is decorated with carvings of animals, fish heads and the sun and moon. It is located on the bank of the Mount Rich River.

## The diving

As with the rest of the tourism market, Grenada's diving is peaceful and very under-used, especially considering its quality. There are plenty of sites for all levels and a good supply of creatures to see. By far the most popular site is the wreck of the *Bianca C*, a 180m long cruise liner which went down in 1961. She lies near to Whibble Reef and is exposed to quite strong currents at times making here a great spot to see pelagics such as jacks, barracuda and eagle rays. The vessel itself is encrusted with hydroids, hard corals and sponges.

For beginners, Grenada has the likes of Molinere Reef, a shelving reef that reaches within 3m of the surface, but also has a fairly impressive wall to 20m at one end.

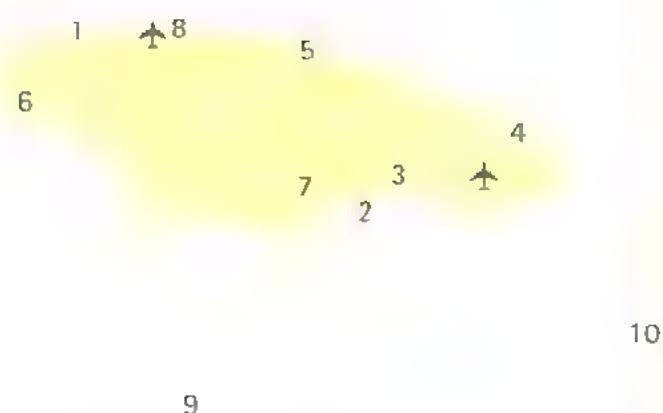
Marine life includes the ubiquitous Creole wrasse, seahorses, angelfish, hawksbill turtles, nurse sharks, barracuda and a myriad of damsels.

Much of the diving takes place around Grenada, but there are also packages to the outer islands where the diving is even more pristine.



# Jamaica

- 1 Montego Bay
- 2 Spanish Town
- 3 Kingston
- 4 Port Antonio
- 5 St Ann's Bay
- 6 Savanna la Mar
- 7 May Pen
- 8 Falmouth
- 9 Pedro Cays
- 10 Morant Cays



**How to get there** ➤ Jamaica has two international airports – Kingston and Montego Bay. Air Jamaica and British Airways operate scheduled flights from London, although in the summer there are a number of charter flights as well.

**Entry requirements** ➤ British citizens need a full passport and a return or onward ticket.

**Climate** ➤ Jamaica sits well within the tropical zone, but is cooled by prevailing trade winds. December through to April is peak season because it is slightly cooler.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None and the water is safe to drink.

**Language** ➤ English

**Currency** ➤ Jamaican dollar.

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Jamaica Tourist Board 1-2 Prince Consort Road, London SW7 2BZ. Tel 0171 224 0505.

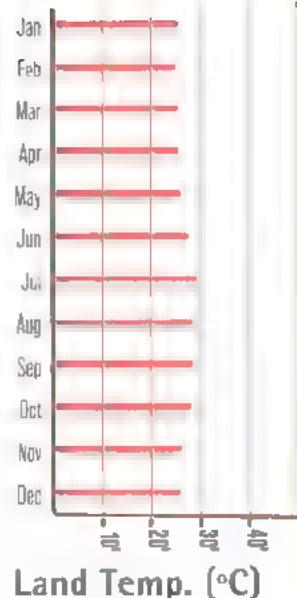


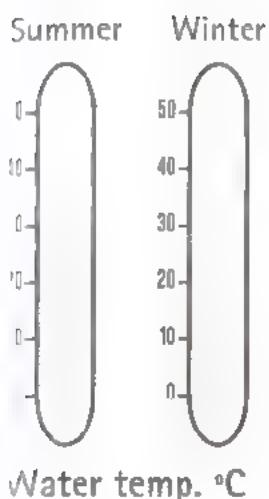
## The country

Jamaica is an island of lush forests, stunning waterfalls and secluded bays – and sometimes all three together. It has been a desirable destination for years and is now seeing a boom in all-inclusive resort holiday.

Its claims to fame include the fact that it is the largest English speaking island in the Caribbean and the country that spawned reggae music.

It started life as a home to the Arawak Indians, but when Columbus discovered it in 1494, their fate was sealed. The British arrived in Jamaica in 1655 and, as was customary then, they had a punch-up with the Spanish. Britain finally gained control of Jamaica and the nearby Cayman Islands in the 1670 Treaty of Madrid.





Pirates feature heavily in Jamaica's history. The town of Port Royal was the centre for this rather brutal trade, but an earthquake ended its dominance in 1692 when the town disappeared into the sea, killing around 2000 men women and children.

These days Jamaica has around 2.5 million residents mostly of African origin. Around 66% of the population is under 30 and religion is mixed between Protestant, Roman Catholic, Rastafarian and several others.

While holidaying in Jamaica, apart from visiting some of the most beautiful sandy coves in the world, take a trip up to the Blue Mountains – the views from the top are just awesome.

## The diving

Jamaica has a very good mix of diving from pristine coral reefs to wrecks and the sunken pirate town of Port Royal. Diving at Port Royal requires a permit and, as you can imagine, the

Jamaican authorities are not keen to give them out to just anyone.

If you are lucky enough to dive here though, you will have a fascinating adventure into a time school boys dream of. But you don't have to dive the sunken town to get a taste of history because Jamaica's reefs are littered with old shipwrecks. These days you'll only see the cannons and anchors, but there are plenty to see. In fact cannons are so common in Jamaica that locals sometimes use them as mooring buoys.

Not all the wrecks are that old, though. The *Cayman Trader*, for example, is a good wreck dive. And there's even a couple of ex-drug running Cessnas in fairly shallow water in Runaway Bay.

Although the majority of the diving is concentrated on the Montego Bay side of the island, there is pretty good diving all around Jamaica and many of the now popular all inclusive resorts come equipped with a dive centre. When the weather is calm, the windward side can offer some outstanding opportunities, including shark sightings.

The reefs themselves are in very good condition compared to many other Caribbean destinations and offer diving from beginner to advanced level.

Jamaica is not over endowed with diving facilities, but those it has offer a good service and there's not too much chance of meeting hordes of other divers at your chosen dive site.



# Martinique

- 
- 1 Grand Riviere
  - 2 Le Precheur
  - 3 Le Lorrain
  - 4 St Pierre
  - 5 Le Robert
  - 6 Le Francois
  - 7 Bellefontaine
  - 8 Fort-de-France
  - 9 Saint-Ann
  - 10 Le Diamant

**How to get there** ➤ Air France flies direct from Paris.

**Entry requirements** ➤ British citizens to have a full passport.

**Climate** ➤ The tropical climate is tempered slightly by cooling and constant trade winds.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None.

**Currency** ➤ Being a part of France, the Franc is the island's legal tender

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Martinique Tourist Office, 2 Rue Des Moulins, 75001, Paris, France. Tel 0033144778622.

## The country

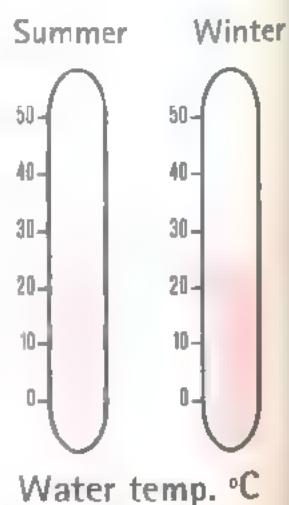
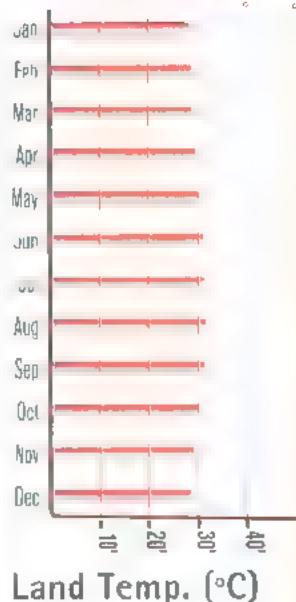
Martinique the largest of the windward islands is part of the French Caribbean and, unlike its British counterparts, who pushed for and got independence, it stays a part of the French nation. It is actually considered a French region and its capital, Fort-de-France is the commercial and administrative centre.



The island, like most here, is volcanic in origin and extremely mountainous and rugged. Its highest peak is an old volcano known as Mount Pelee, which was last active at the beginning of the century. The island has been inhabited by Europeans (mainly French) and African slaves since the early 17th century, the main industry then was sugarcane, but these days Petroleum, tourism and rum making.

## The diving

As with many other Caribbean islands Martinique is better known for top side watersports than underwater pursuits because of the constant trade winds that blow from the east, but underwater Martinique is as beautiful as anything the Caribbean has to offer. The wind does restrict diving to the western side of the





island, but that is no hardship considering the life here.

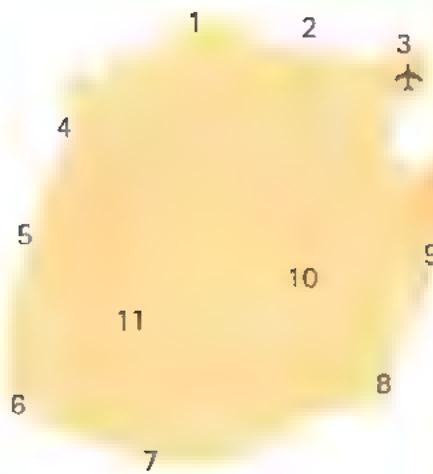
Many of the sites offer a range of depths from the surface down to safe diving limits, but there are also some very easy sites and a couple that offer a challenge to the experienced diver. The reefs are typical Caribbean with plenty of hard stony corals, numerous large sponges and algal formations. Fish life is good and includes the standard Caribbean reef varieties, which are bolstered by barracuda, Atlantic spadefish, jacks, the occasional shark and quite large shoals of snappers. One of the best experienced dives is on the southern tip around the small islet of Rocher Du Diamant. The islet is in the channel between the Caribbean and the Atlantic and is a great place for seeing large pelagics including shoals of jacks and Atlantic spadefish as well as sharks, rays and even the odd whale shark.

During March and April humpback whales migrate past the rock and can sometimes be heard and there is even a resident school of Atlantic white-sided dolphins that can often be seen underwater.

Most of the dive operators on Martinique are either found in Fort de France or connected to resorts.



- 1 Great Point
- 2 Green Island
- 3 Flat Point
- 4 Well's Bay
- 5 Ladder Bay
- 6 Tent Point
- 7 Great Level Bay
- 8 Corner Point
- 9 Core Gut Bay
- 10 Windwardside
- 11 The Bottom



**How to get there** ➔ There's no room for an international airport and so you have to catch a Winair 15 seater Otter twin prop to Juancho Yrausquin airport from St Maarten. Flights here are from Paris or Amsterdam.

**Entry requirements** ➔ A full passport

**Climate** ➔ Saba experiences a warm pleasant climate with temperatures around the mid to high twenties centigrade most days of the year. Cloud formations and rain do vary thanks to the island's mountainous terrain.

**Inoculations required** ➔ None

**Language** ➔ Dutch is the official Language, although everyone speaks English.

**Currency** ➔ Netherlands Antilles Florins, although the US dollar is also accepted.

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Saba Tourist office, PO Box 527, Windwardside, Saba, Netherlands Antilles.

## The country

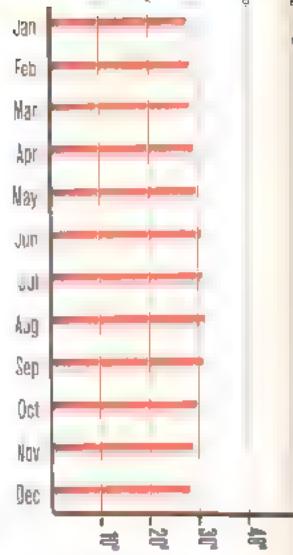
Saba is a tiny (only five square miles), island in the Caribbean and really an unsung wonder. The landscape is dominated by Mount Scenic a 900m peak covered in tropical forest. So rocky is the island that the airport is on one of the very few flat pieces of land and the main town, Bottom, is in an old volcanic crater. All the names on Saba relate to their geographic location. The capital, Bottom, is obvious, so too is Mount Scenery. The town of Windwardside is on the windward side of the island and Flat Point is the home of the airport.

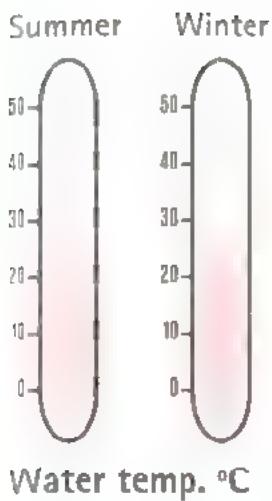
Saba is one of the few nations of the world that boasts a crime rate of zero. There are no locks on doors, there's a police force of five and everyone knows everyone else. The Island is basically a living and breathing picture postcard. The houses are all white-washed cottages with red tin roofs and green shutters, the gardens are immaculately tended and the views over the ocean are just magical.

There is plenty to offer the visitor including restaurants, quaint hotels and guest houses, watersports, rainforest walks and a very relaxed atmosphere.

## The diving

Saba's underwater scenery is just as spectacular as the top side. Much of it is





deep, but all is outstandingly beautiful. A marine park has been in operation for many years and the dive operators all abide by and are dedicated to its rules. The multi-zone Park extends all around the island and out to many offshore reefs from the high water mark to a depth of 60m. It has won several awards and honors and it is easy to see why.

The result is an underwater paradise full of fish, rays and turtles. But the fauna backdrop takes second place to the topography. Saba has all the usual Caribbean reefs, but it is also the proud owner of some spectacular deep water seamounts. These are volcanic peaks that never quite made it to the surface. In fact they got to about 30m and ran out of juice. The water surrounding the seamounts is fed by nutrient rich upwellings and life explodes around them. Each rock face is covered in corals, algae and sponges and overhead swarms of chromis and creole wrasse congregate. These in turn bring in jacks, barracuda and sharks. Each pinnacle supports its own eco system.

One such pinnacle, known as the Eye of the Needle, is only about 10 metres in diameter and rises out of the depths like a huge tree trunk devoid of branches and eaves.

All over, the offshore pinnacles are quite deep and therefore only suitable for experienced divers, however, the island also has many other shallower and easier dives that are still outstanding. Sites such as Torrens Point, Well's Bay Point, Big Rock Market, Custom's House Reef and Hole in the Corner all illustrate just how good Saba diving is.

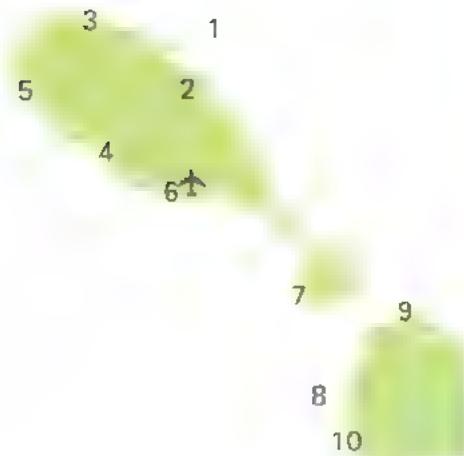
There are three well equipped dive centres on the island—each offering the same sort of packages and a variety of training.

There is also a four person recompression chamber, which was donated by the Dutch Navy. It is operated by the Saba Marine Park and staffed by trained volunteers.



# St. Kitts

- 1 St. Kitts
- 2 Cayon
- 3 Dieppe Bay Town
- 4 Old Road Town
- 5 Sandy Point Town
- 6 Basseterre
- 7 Nags Head
- 8 Nevis
- 9 Newcastle
- 10 Charlestown



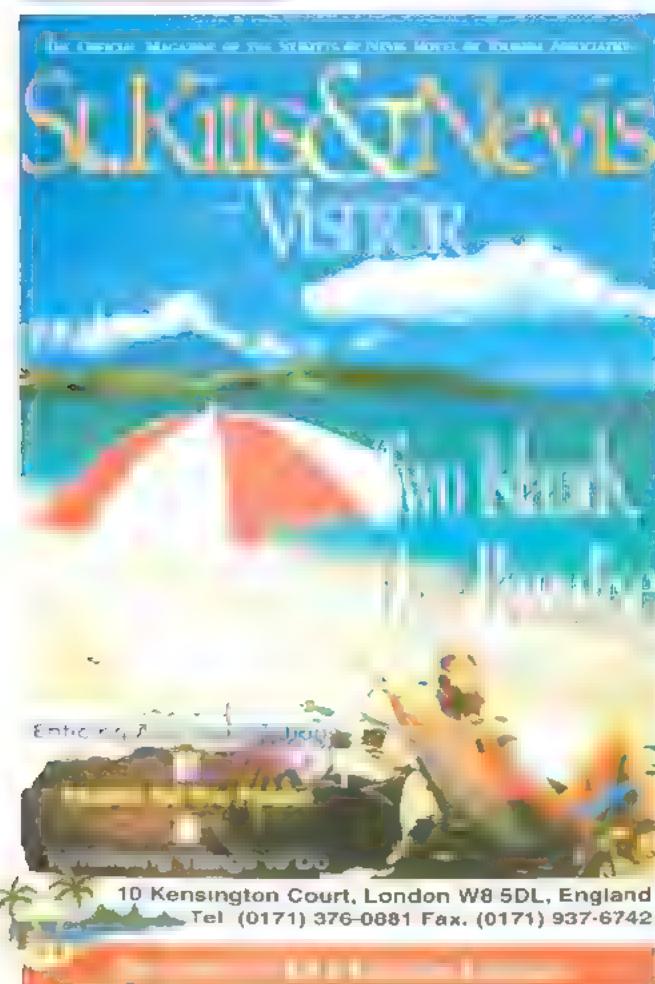
**How to get there** → St Kitts has an international airport and requires flights from the UK arrive here. Alternatively you can take an international flight to any other island and take a smaller aircraft to either St Kitts or Nevis.

**Entry requirements** → British citizens only require a passport.

**Climate** → The Islands experience the typical pleasant Caribbean climate with North Easterly trade winds tempering the hot sun. Year round temperatures are generally 25 °C.

**Inoculations required** → None.

**Language** → English is the official language

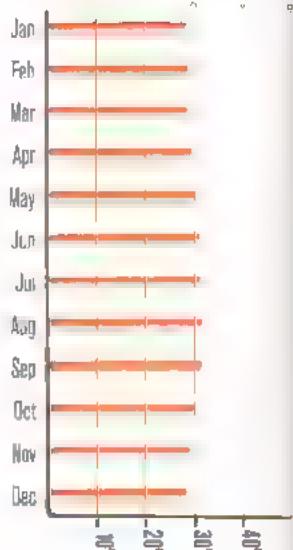


**Currency** → The Eastern Caribbean Dollar is the official currency.

## The country

The Island of St Kitts and its sister to the south, Nevis, are now an independent state having split from Britain in 1985. St Kitts is the main town and home to the capital Basseterre. The island is volcanic in origin and like many in the region is mountainous and densely vegetated with tropical forest and productive banana and sugarcane plantations.

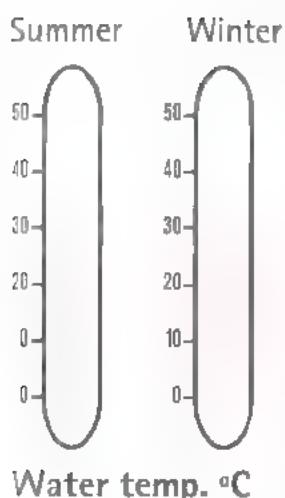
Much of the St Kitts skyline is dominated by the 1,156 metre high Mount Misery. There are



plenty of walks through the forests and bird-watching is a pastime enjoyed by many visitors.

Other attractions include a visit to the Fort Brimstone museum, which contains artefacts from the early days of St Kitts and includes various pieces removed from the sealer by divers. These are preserved before taking their place in exhibits.

The other Fort worth visiting is Charles, which, along with Brimstone helped keep St Kitts British and away from the French, the other big force in the region in the 17 and 18th centuries.



## The diving

Because of its naval history, old wreck sites play a big role in St Kitts' diving. One area especially stands out. It's called Anchors Reef and is the spot where about 200 French, British and Dutch ships have sunk here and their anchors, cannons and ballast stones and even musket balls can be found. Many are now coral encrusted and several cannons are now simply half buried in the coral. Divers finding anything small enough to lift are required to give the item to the dive guide who passes it on to the Museum at Fort Brimstone.

Other attractions include huge barrel sponges, good coral growth, plenty of fish and not many divers.

The diving is quite easy and relaxed and the underwater typography reflects the topside scenery. The reefs are a collection of gullies, grottoes, drop-offs and the odd cavern.

Yet not every dive here is easy. One particularly challenging, yet rewarding, dive is found on the southern tip of the island. Called Nags Head, it is the point where the Caribbean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean and is often washed by currents. The reef is not difficult as it gently slopes in steps from 4m to well past safe diving limits. Fish life here is often prolific with eagle and sting rays, black tip reef sharks (although these are quite shy), king mackerel, jacks, blue runners, and shoals of yellowtail snappers.

There are a few dive centres on St Kitts and a couple on Nevis. There's also a liveaboard – the *Caribbean Explorer* – which visits the islands.



# St. Lucia

- |               |            |
|---------------|------------|
| 1 Cap Point   | 12 Praslin |
| 2 Gros Islet  | 13 Rum Cay |
| 3 Grand Anse  | 14 Dennery |
| 4 Marquis     |            |
| 5 Castries    |            |
| 6 Sans Soucis |            |
| 7 Canaries    |            |
| 8 Choisuel    |            |
| 9 Labories    |            |
| 10 Vieux Fort |            |
| 11 Micoud     |            |

**How to get there** ➤ BWIA and a couple of charter airlines fly into the island's main airport which is a few hours away from the capital.

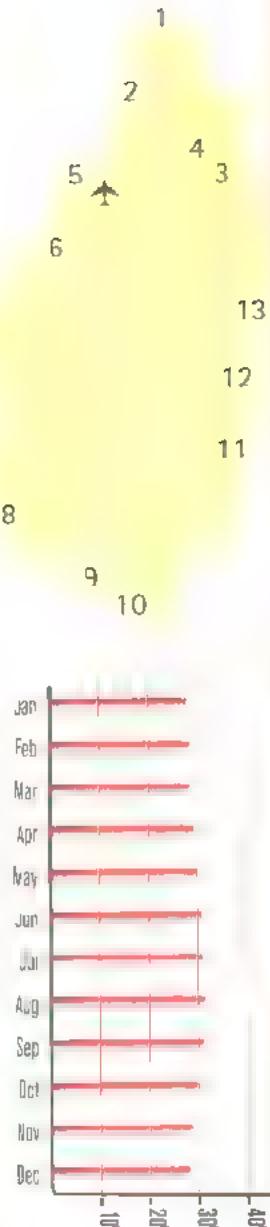
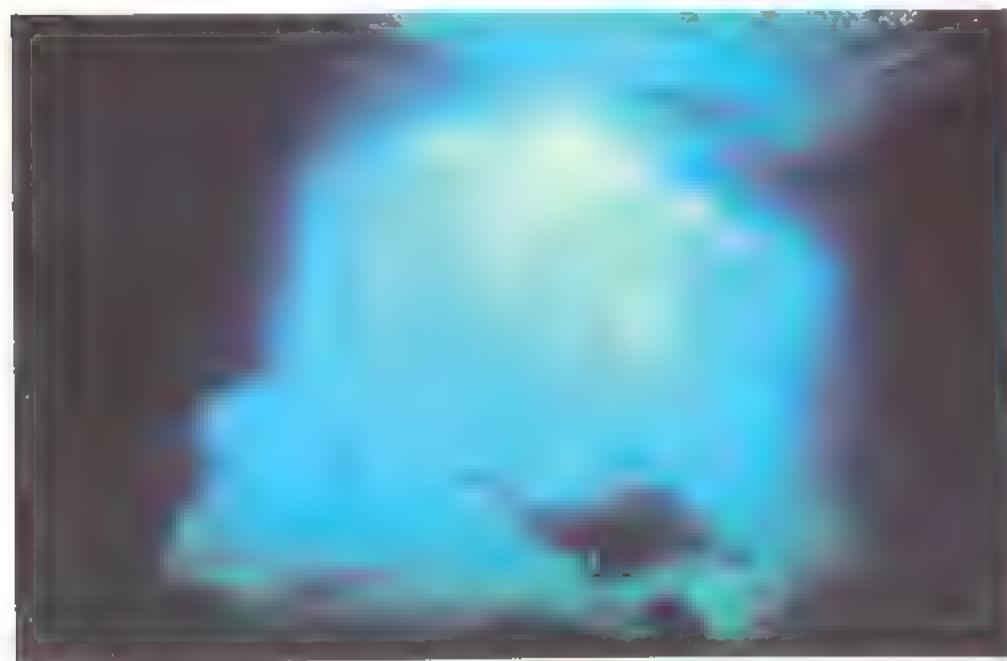
**Entry requirements** ➤ British citizens require a full passport.

**Climate** ➤ The tropical climate is tempered slightly by cooling and constant trade winds.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None.

**Currency** ➤ The East Caribbean dollar

**Tourist Authority** ➤ St Lucia Tourist Board, 421a Finchley Road, London NW3 6HJ. Tel 0171 431 3675.



## The country

St Lucia is one of the prettiest Caribbean islands. Its Pitons area is simply breathtaking. Here, two huge and steep-faced pinnacles shoot up from sea level to a staggering 2,461 feet and 3,145 feet. They are actually lava plugs of an ancient volcano long since worn away.

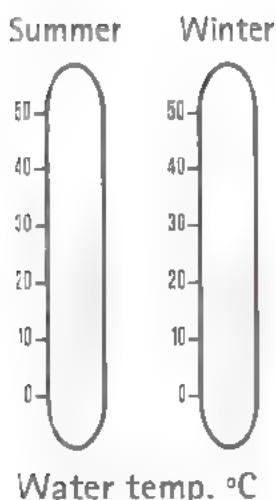
St Lucia is covered with dense rainforest which contains magical waterfalls, more wildlife than you could care to mention, and stunning



scenery. The beaches are excellent here, too, and many are often deserted. There are several nature reserves on the island, plenty of banana plantations and some of the liveliest nightlife around. Gros Islet in the north is great on a Friday night for its street celebrations, rustic bars and all round entertainment. This is where the locals get down and everyone is made welcome.

The main town of Castries is well worth a look for its street markets and traditional Caribbean architecture.

St Lucia is big on the all-inclusive package holiday and is home to several large resorts. These offer excellent value and great facilities, but don't remain locked away from the rest of the island. The island is too good to be ignored. The mix of scenery, wildlife and friendly locals is incredible.



## The diving

Just like the land, the underwater scenery in St Lucia is breathtaking and the profusion of life is incredible – St Lucia surpasses many other parts of the Caribbean. The best diving is found in the south west corner of the island and this is where most of the dive centres are located.

Diving is well known among Caribbean enthusiasts. The Soufriere area is considered a high point here and it is easy to see why. It is just under the P'tons, has marine park status and offers some of the most amazing underwater scenery. Apart from steep sloping walls and a line of impressive and life covered pinnacles, the Soufriere area is littered with gullies and filled with fish. All over the park the coral growth is so prolific that very few areas of rock are visible. Sea fans adorn vertical faces, hard coral smothers boulders and algae cling on where they find space. Over this, huge barrel sponges stick up from the sea bed and all around shoals of snapper, chromis and wrasse are seen in profusion. A small fee is levied to dive the marine park, but it is well worth it to keep this area safe.

Another of St Lucia's outstanding spots is the Anse Chastanet marine park. Here you will find outstanding coral, steep walls, a brilliant cave and amazing fish life. Almost every Caribbean underwater habitat is found here and so too are most life forms from barracuda to peacock flounders.

There is a wreck just up the coast from Anse Chastanet. Called the *Lesleen M*, she was deliberately put down several years ago. The marine environment has now claimed her and fish flutter around her hull, arrow crabs hide in the crevices and the superstructure is resplendent with life. It is possible to use some of her swim-throughs, although it is best to follow the guides to ensure it is safe.

# St. Vincent

- 1 *Fancy*
- 2 *Chateaubelair*
- 3 *Kingstown*
- 4 *Geargetown*
- 5 *Port Elizabeth*
- 6 *Mustique*
- 7 *The Grenadines*
- 8 *Canouan*
- 9 *Union Island*
- 10 *Mayreau*

**How to get there** ➔ BW A and British Airways fly to Antigua. To reach St Vincent you will have to connect to a smaller airline – probably LAT.

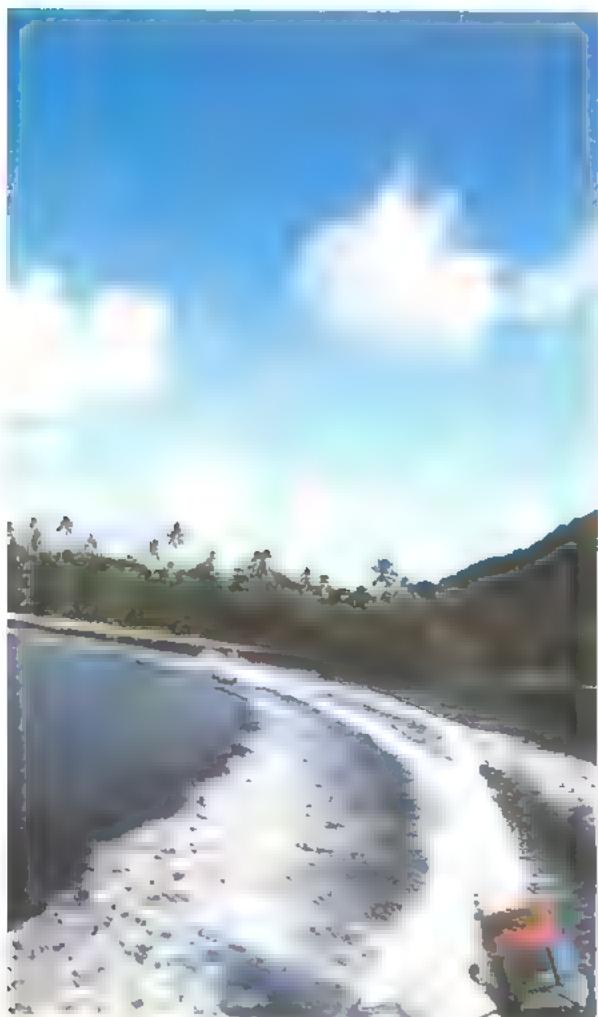
**Entry requirements** ➔ British citizens require a full passport.

**Climate** ➔ The tropical climate is tempered slightly by cooling and constant trade winds.

**Inoculations required** ➔ None.

**Currency** ➔ The East Caribbean dollar

**Tourist Authority** ➔ St Vincent and the Grenadines Department of Tourism, 10 Kensington Court, London W8 5DL. Tel 0171 937 6570.



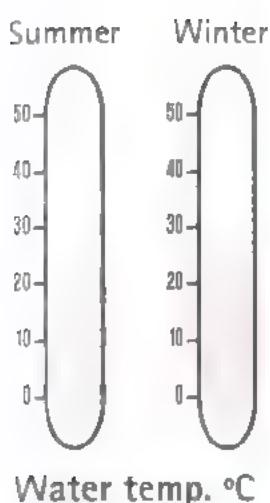
## The country

St Vincent and the small Grenadine islands are an independent state within the Windward chain. They are mountainous and, like the other islands, covered in lush forest. The strata is volcanic in origin and St Vincent's volcano, La Soufrière, rises some 4000ft out of the sea. It last erupted in 1979 indicating that this area is still geographically under development. However, an eruption isn't expected anytime soon and you can even take a volcano tour to see the crater.

The island is 133 sq miles of lushly forested steep mountain slopes, many of which plunge into the Caribbean Sea. This is dramatically demonstrated at the Falls of Baleine, where a river flows through the forest and out over a high cliff straight into the sea. Other attractions include the oldest botanical gardens in the 'New World' which has original



Land Temp. (°C)



breadfruit trees brought to St Vincent from the South Pacific by Captain Bligh of the Bounty (the famous mutiny case).

### The diving

St Vincent and the Grenadines offer divers an interesting time. St Vincent's claim to fame is its black coral, which grows nearer the surface here than most other islands in the chain. The coral is protected by law and so it's a look-and-don't-touch affair.

Wall dives are another speciality. The steep rocky landscape is mirrored underwater and sheer cliff faces are a common sight. Yet not everything is deep. There are plenty of shallow sites that are covered in coral, sponges and algae and are home to a profusion of life from rays to barracuda and large angelfish to large lobsters.

As far as blow your socks off experiences go, St Vincent is a little lacking, but it does have a fine collection of rare, yet small creatures from seahorses to frogfish.

Visibility is generally good and the water temperature is always in the late 20s Cent grade.

Can you put up with:  
Superb scenery;

Challenging sailing waters;

Excellent diving spots;

Fabulous flora and fauna;

Delightful nature walks:

A wonderful climate;

Fun, sun and friendly people?

**Yes?**

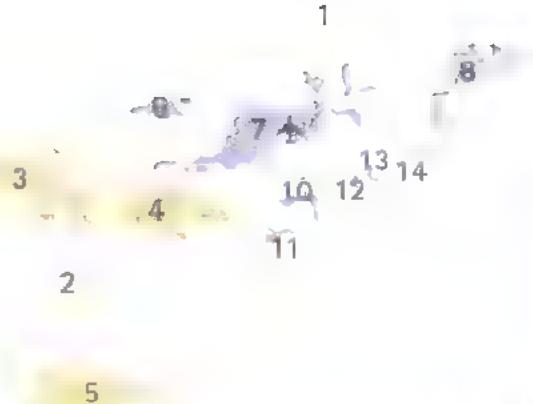
Then St. Vincent and the Grenadines welcomes you to the most beautiful string of islands in the Caribbean



Call or write for a brochure and a free travel guide  
St. Vincent and the Grenadines Travel Office  
10 Kensington Court, London W8 5DL, England  
Tel: 0171 937 6570 Fax: 0171 937 3611

# Virgin Isles

- |                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| 1 British Virgin Is. | 12 Salt Island   |
| 2 Virgin Is. (USA)   | 13 Cooper Island |
| 3 St. Thomas         | 14 Ginger Island |
| 4 St. John           |                  |
| 5 St. Croix          |                  |
| 6 Jost Van Dyke      |                  |
| 7 Tortola            |                  |
| 8 Virgin Gorda       |                  |
| 9 Anegada            |                  |
| 10 Peter Island      |                  |
| 11 Norman Island     |                  |



## British Virgin Islands

**How to get there** ➤ To reach these beautiful, out of the way, islands you first have to get to Antigua. Carriers include British Airways and British West Indies Air (BWIA). Then you take a smaller airline or a charter airline to Tortola. From here it's either a short taxi or boat ride to your ultimate destination. Flights usually arrive at night.

**Entry requirements** ➤ Return or ongoing tickets and adequate finances for your stay.

**Climate** ➤ Eastern trade winds breeze across the islands tempering the hot sun that beats down for most of the year lowering humidity. However, showers can appear at anytime and hurricane season runs during the summer months – although thankfully only a few have hit the islands.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None

**Language** ➤ English

**Currency** ➤ US dollar

**Tourist Authority** ➤ BVI Tourist Board, 110 St Martins Lane, London WC2N 4DY. Tel 0171 240 4259, fax 0171 240 4270.

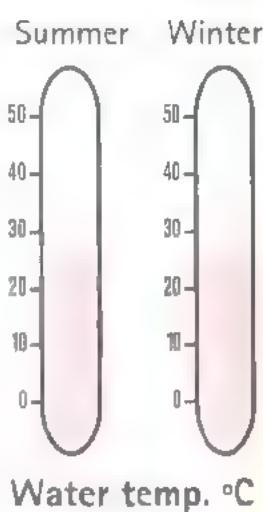
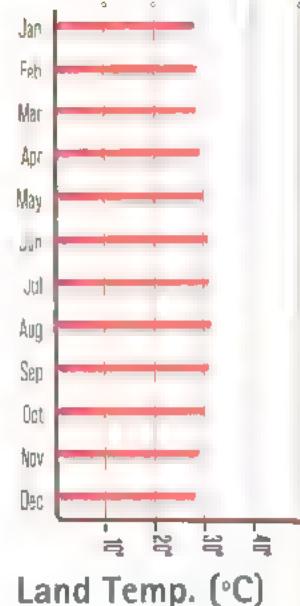
## The country

The British Virgin Islands, known as the BVI, are a collection of some 60 or so islands – some quite large, such as Tortola, the main island, and Virgin Gorda (the fat virgin) – while others, such as Ginger Is and Salt Island are very small. Most of the islands are within fairly close proximity and surround Sir Francis Drake Channel. The main centres on each island are quite modern, but very relaxed. There is some stunning scenery on the islands the baths though is considered the best. These are huge boulders at the sea shore that form small caves and swim-throughs. They are well worth a visit as is the marine park.

## The diving

The BVI has all the qualities of a world-class dive site, but none of the hordes of divers. There are numerous reefs, a top quality and world famous wreck, bountiful marine life and generally favourable conditions.

Many of the reefs are shallow and easy to dive, giving divers the



opportunity to safely explore their features with plenty of time. However, the visibility is generally not as good as other destinations in the Caribbean. Sometimes the Atlantic swell brings in plankton rich water that reduces the visibility from 30m to 15m, but this is not such a disadvantage as you would think. Yes, the reduced visibility is a turn off for some, but the increased plankton levels mean increased marine life, especially filter feeders and the lower life forms that form the building blocks of the food chain. The upshot is some of the most healthy looking systems in the Caribbean.

And, what is more, if a hurricane does come along (and several have hit these islands over the years) it doesn't take too long for the reefs to start rebuilding themselves.

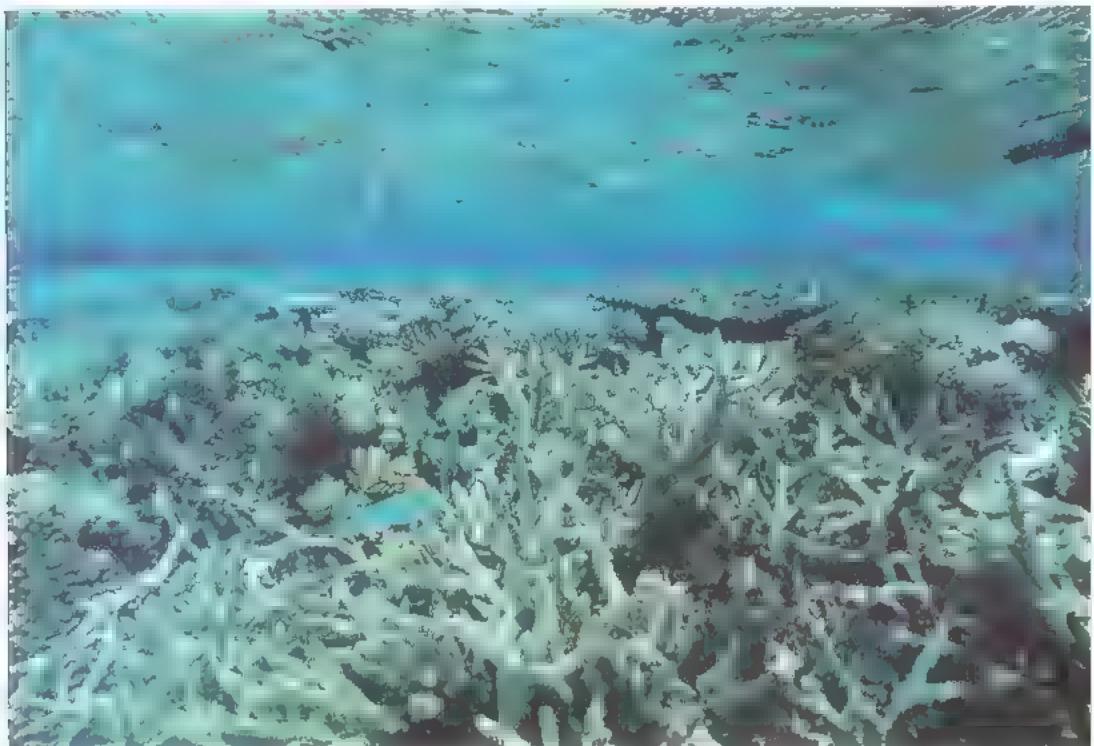
Some of the Caribbean's most beautiful creatures live in these waters including French and grey angelfish, several species of moray eel, nurse shark, snappers and grunts, which form huge shoals and the impressive trumpet fish.

Pelagics are also common around the islands and these include barracuda, jacks and even turtles. Large hawksbills are probably the most common species seen here because they nest on the nearby US Virgin Island of St Croix.

Wrecks are a speciality of the Virgin Islands, not in their numbers necessarily, but for historical interest, there are some corkers. The most famous is the Rhone, a British mail steamer that was dashed against the rocky Salt Island in 1867 by a hurricane.

She now lies in several pieces – two large, the rest scattered wreckage next to the island. She is a popular wreck and, because she is shallow, a favourite place for novice training and resort dives. The more fascinating bow section is beyond the reach of those with less buoyancy control and has developed into a scenic oasis in the bland sandy bottom. Fish life, sponges and corals abound here and you can even swim through the superstructure because the decking is long gone.

The Rhone would probably have stayed an unknown special dive for those



# Virgin Isles

in the know if it had not been for Stan Watermann, the film-maker, who used the wreck to create the film, *The Deep*.

Other historical wrecks are less well known, yet still fascinating. In the time of Drake, hundreds of galleons and wooden war ships plied these dangerous waters and several stumbled into Cannon Reef, although it wasn't called that then. Now, with the wooden parts buried in the coral or devoured by ship worms, all that remains visible are the impressive cannons. They lie in very shallow water – two metres – and stand as a testament to a time long gone.

Conversely, there is also the wreck of a modern tug boat that was sunk as an artificial reef and has already started to gather residents.

The BVI also has several outstanding special reefs that few divers visit because of their distance and remoteness. Blonde Rock, Alice in Wonderland and Anegada's are just three of those that should be visited if conditions and dive operators allow.

## US Virgin Islands

**How to get there** ➡ You can get to the US Virgin Islands either by connecting to American Airlines flights at New York or LIAT flights from Antigua (for info on how to get that far see BVI).



**Entry requirements** ➡ Valid passport

**Climate** ➡ Identical to the British Virgin Islands.

**Inoculations required** ➡ None

**Language** ➡ American English

**Currency** ➡ US dollar

**Tourist authority** ➡ US Virgin Islands Division of Tourism, 2 Cinnamon Row, Plantation Wharf, York Place, London SW11 3TW. Tel 0171 978 5262.

## The country

Although only next door to the BVI, the USVI are completely different. They are actually an annex of the United States and so you have to obey the same customs and immigration laws as you do when entering mainland USA. The islands are a lot livelier than BVI and completely different.

In both look and ambience Although the islands are considered laid back by US standards, they are not the isolated and unspoilt beauties that the BVI are. However they are still dramatic and you can still get away from it all, especially on the less inhabited St Croix.

St Thomas and St John are volcanic in origin and so have the most dramatic landscapes, but with this comes a lack of building and so the towns and villages tend to be more crowded. St Croix was formed by tectonic plate movement rather than volcanic activity and so its interior is flatter. It has a smaller and more scattered population.

Although considered as Caribbean islands St Thomas is actually in the Atlantic Ocean, St John borders the two and only St Croix is within the Caribbean Sea. The islands are a mixture of lush rain forests, beautiful sandy beaches and bays and high peaks. About 125cms of rain falls per year, but there are no rivers to wash sediment into the water.

## The diving

Like the BVI, the USVI's reefs are shallow, richly populated and generally easy to dive. They also suffer occasionally from the same plankton washes that sweep in from the Atlantic.

Sites on offer include the wall dive on St Croix, several wrecks and an underwater nature trail. Sadly this latter

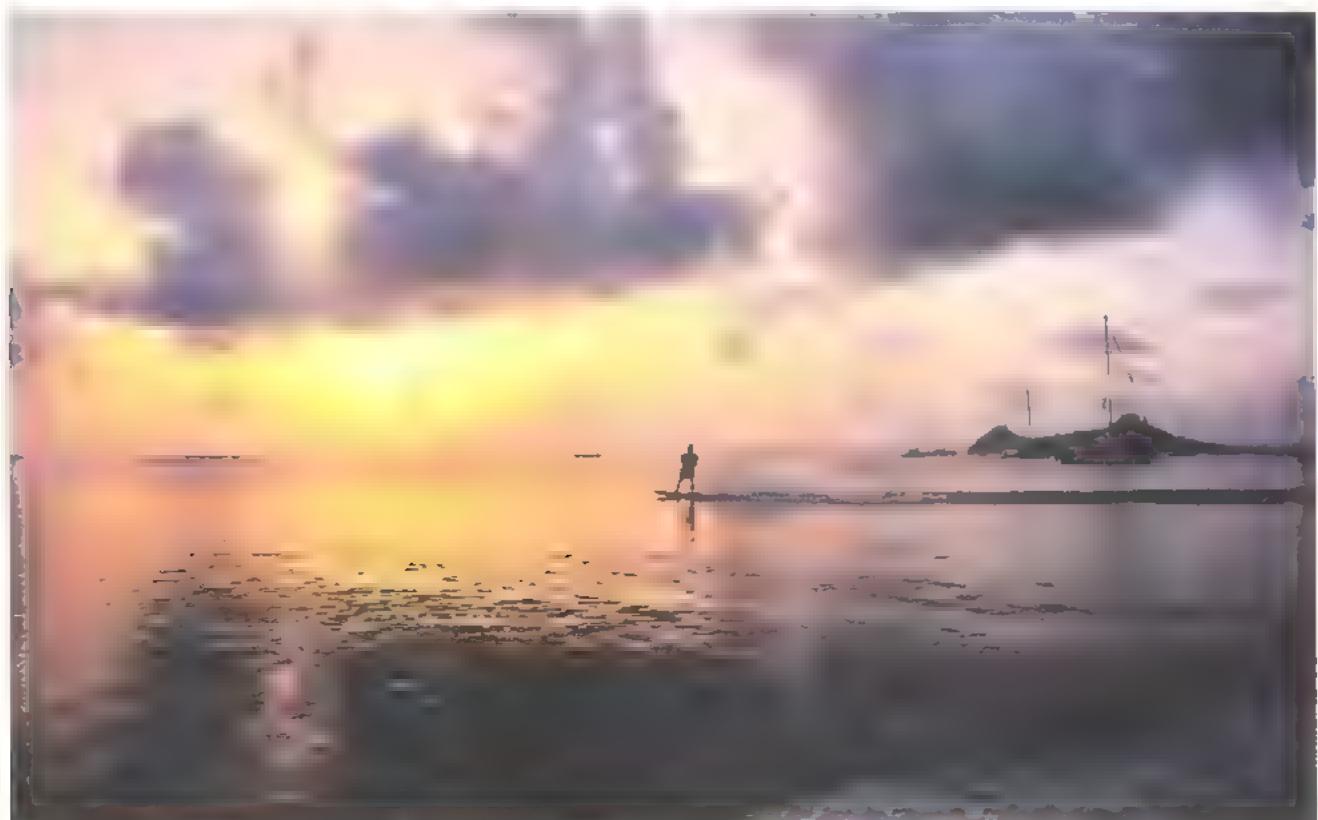


# Virgin Isles

site, which was within the confines of Buck Island Marine Park, off St Croix, was literally blown to bits by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. All the beautiful coral formations were devastated within 24 hours. Now the reef is repairing itself and it has created a unique opportunity for divers to see a reef recolonising itself.

Wreck enthusiasts are kept happy by several wrecks, the most notable of which is the West Indies Trader off St Thomas. She was a 400ft freighter, but now sits upright in 33m of water. The wreck starts at 12m and descends to the sandy bottom. She is in outstanding condition and is considered by some as the best wreck in the USVI.

The St Croix wall is the only true wall dive in the Virgin Islands and offers a spectacular scene. At various places (most named) the wall reaches to within 10m of the surface yet plummets to over 200m. The diveable depths are crammed with huge barrel sponges, hard corals and sea whips. The generally clear waters are also cruised by many pelagic species including jacks and barracuda. Apart from being a classic wall, this area of sea also has some interesting topography. For example, a site known as Salt River Canyon looks more like a river estuary than anything else, but no fresh water rivers enters the sea from the island. The canyon is about half a mile wide and forms a strangely shaped harbour. There are a number of named dive sites here which definitely should not be passed up.

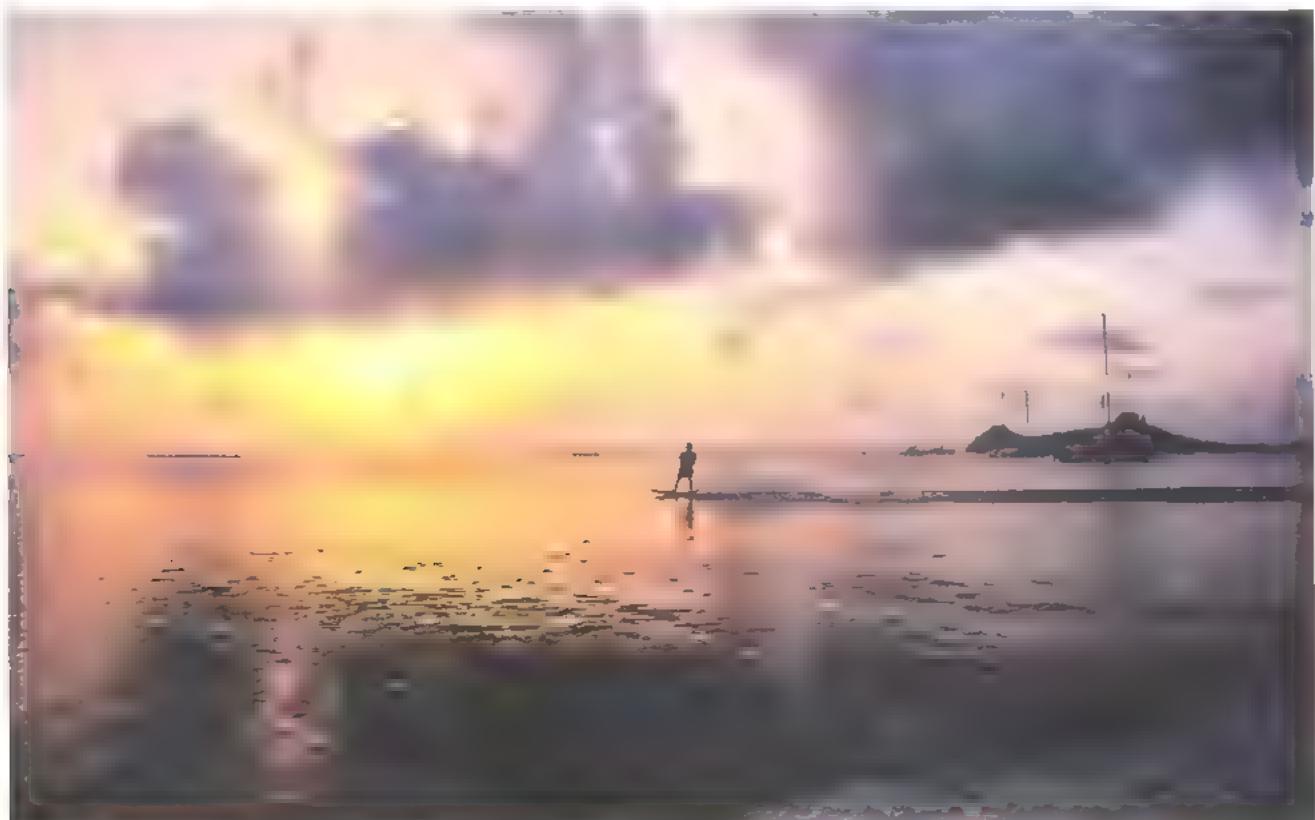


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site, which was within the confines of Buck Island Marine Park, off St Croix, was literally blown to bits by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. All the beautiful coral formations were devastated within 24 hours. Now the reef is repairing itself and it has created a unique opportunity for divers to see a reef recolonising itself.

Wreck enthusiasts are kept happy by several wrecks, the most notable of which is the West Indies Trader off St Thomas. She was a 400ft freighter, but now sits upright in 33m of water. The wreck starts at 12m and descends to the sandy bottom. She is in outstanding condition and is considered by some as the best wreck in the USVI.

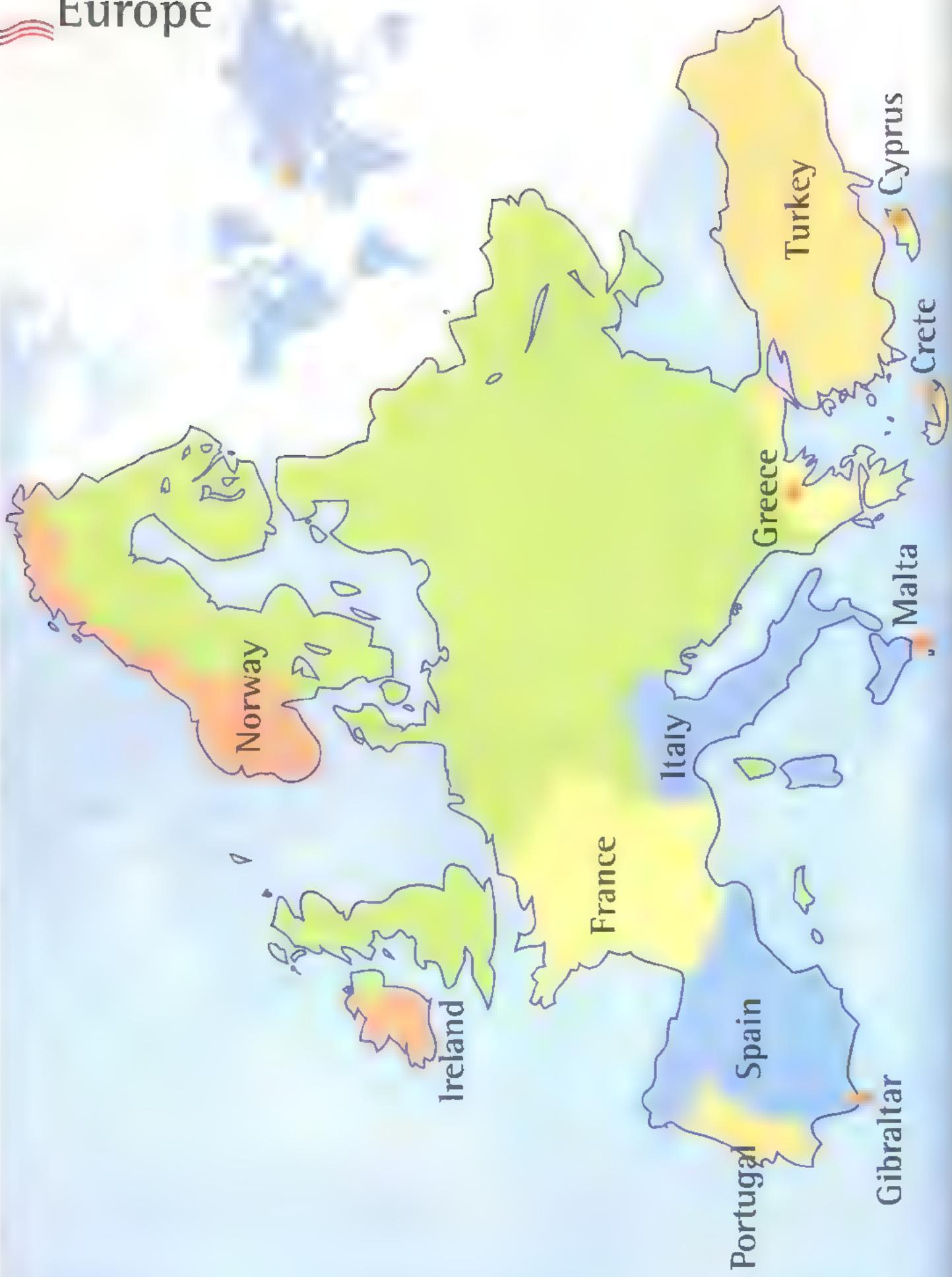
The St Croix wall is the only true wall dive in the Virgin Islands and offers a spectacular scene. At various places (most named) the wall reaches to within 10m of the surface yet plummets to over 200m. The diveable depths are crammed with huge barrel sponges, hard corals and sea whips. The generally clear waters are also cruised by many pelagic species including jacks and barracuda. Apart from being a classic wall, this area of sea also has some interesting topography. For example, a site known as Salt River Canyon looks more like a river estuary than anything else, but no fresh water rivers enters the sea from the island. The canyon is about half a mile wide and forms a strangely shaped harbour. There are a number of named dive sites here which definitely should not be passed up.



# Europe



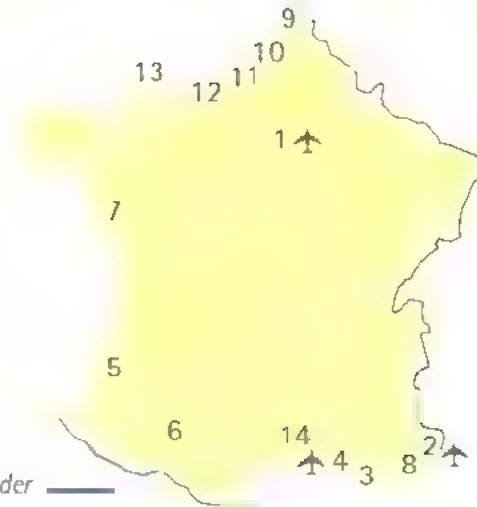
# Europe



# France

- |              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1 Paris      | 12 Le Havre    |
| 2 Nice       | 13 Cherbourg   |
| 3 Toulon     | 14 Montpellier |
| 4 Marseilles |                |
| 5 Bordeaux   |                |
| 6 Toulouse   |                |
| 7 Nantes     |                |
| 8 Cannes     |                |
| 9 Calais     |                |
| 10 Boulogne  |                |
| 11 Dieppe    |                |

Inland border



**How to get there** → You can either fly, drive, sail or train it to France. In fact the only link that we don't have yet is a bridge, although that may not be too far away.

**Entry requirements** → Sometimes you need a passport, other times you don't. Always take it just in case.

**Climate** → This depends on where you are going. Northern France has a similar climate to the south coast of the UK, but the far south is quite pleasant all year around.

**Tourist authority** → French Government Tourist Office, 178 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AL. Tel 0171 493 9232.

## The country

As our nearest neighbour, France is one of the easiest countries to visit. It is so near in fact that you can see it from Dover on a clear day. France has two main diving areas – the Channel and the Mediterranean coasts.

For the most part, divers visiting the Normandy coast take a liveaboard vessel from the UK and spend most of their time on board, only going ashore to buy cheap booze – the British passion when on the other side of the Channel.

It is France's Mediterranean coast that gets much of the attention from European divers, although sadly many British divers tend to ignore this area.

France's share of the Mediterranean coast is not huge compared to what it owns along the Channel and Bay of Biscay, but it crams in plenty to offer the scuba diver. This coast houses two large towns – Marseilles and Nice – several smaller ones, and the island of Corsica near the Italian coast.

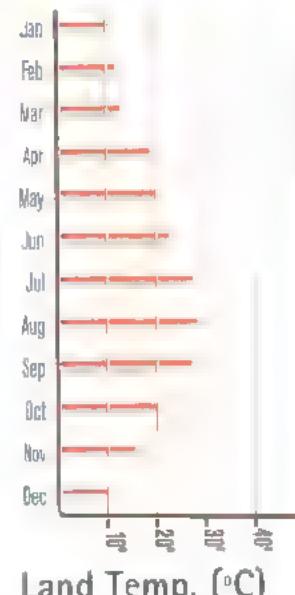
Marseilles has the greater potential for diving on the mainland but Corsica is the most favoured spot.

Marseilles lies on the eastern side of the large bay called the Golfe du Lion and is a busy tourist town with a good airport, plenty of accommodation and all the other services visitors require.

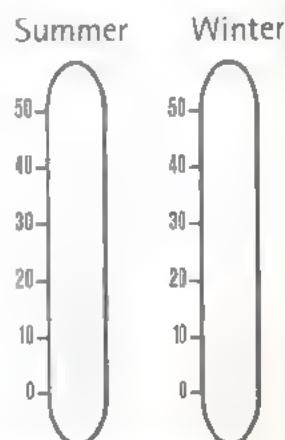
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The only real reason to dive northern France is for the wrecks off Normandy – mainly left over from the Second World War. French divers are not allowed too far off the coast and so most of the vessels have remained untouched for fifty years.

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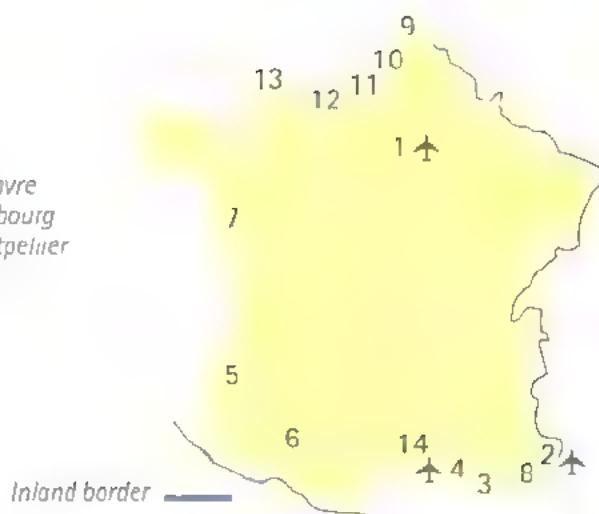
Land Temp. (°C)



Water temp. °C

# France

- |                     |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 <i>Paris</i>      | 12 <i>Le Havre</i>    |
| 2 <i>Nice</i>       | 13 <i>Cherbourg</i>   |
| 3 <i>Toulon</i>     | 14 <i>Montpellier</i> |
| 4 <i>Marseilles</i> |                       |
| 5 <i>Bordeaux</i>   |                       |
| 6 <i>Toulouse</i>   |                       |
| 7 <i>Nantes</i>     |                       |
| 8 <i>Cannes</i>     |                       |
| 9 <i>Calais</i>     |                       |
| 10 <i>Boulogne</i>  |                       |
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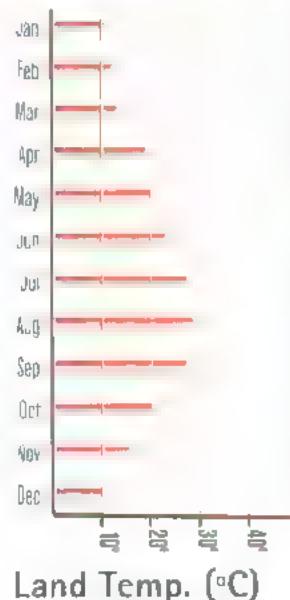
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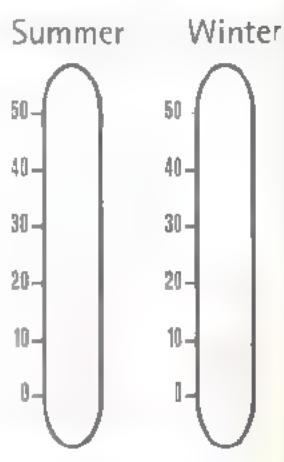
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Land Temp. (°C)



Water temp. °C

# Gibraltar

- 1 Lighthouse
- 2 Fortress HQ
- 3 Europe flats
- 4 Grand Parade
- 5 St Michael's Cove
- 6 Gibraltar Town
- 7 Catalan Bay
- 8 Governor's Beach
- 9 Moorish Castle
- 10 Detached Mole



**How to get there** → There are regular flights into Gibraltar airport from the UK.

**Entry requirements** → Proof of identification, such as a passport.

**Climate** → Gibraltar experiences a pleasant climate with a hot summer and warm winter.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → British

**Currency** → Sterling

**Tourist Authority** → Gibraltar Government Tourist Office, Arundel Great Court, 1-9 The Strand, London WC2R 1EH. Tel 0171 836 0777.

## The country

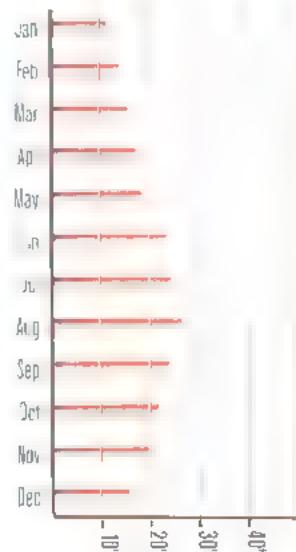
Gibraltar, known as The Rock, has been a part of Britain since a combined Anglo-Dutch war fleet took it in 1715. Spain has never really come to terms with this and still wants the Rock back. Over the years it has besieged Gibraltar 15 times, with one attempt at capture lasting a staggering three years, seven months and 12 days!

The Rock remains in British hands although there has been a move for independence under EU sponsorship.

Every year thousands of UK tourists come here to bask in the sun within the comfort of a familiar British ambience. For such a small place – so small that the runway has roads crossing it – it has a remarkably diverse natural environment. The Rock's most famous inhabitants are the Barbary apes – Europe's only wild primates. The apes have lived here for centuries and a local legend says that if the apes leave, the Rock will cease to be British.

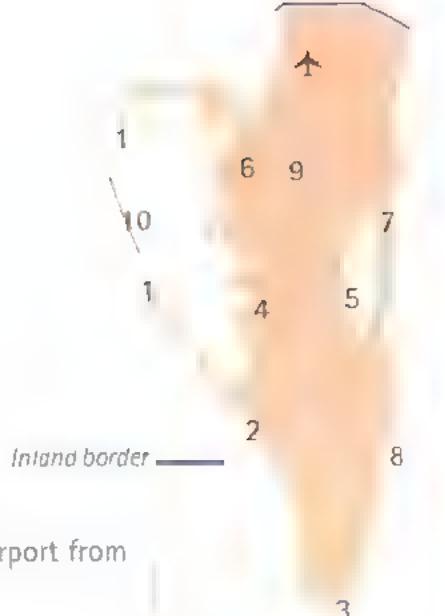
Being located on the southernmost part of the Spanish mainland and only a little more than a stone's throw from Morocco in Africa, means that every spring and autumn the Rock plays host to millions of migrating birds. They use the rock as a navigation point while flying to and from their breeding grounds in Europe. It is a staggering sight and an ornithologist's dream.

Other natural wonders include the many species of plant life that have colonised the area. Jasmine, honeysuckle, geraniums, lavender and palms all live here along with several very rare species. Because of all this natural beauty much of the upper parts of the rock have been designated a nature reserve.



# Gibraltar

- 1 Lighthouse
- 2 Fortress HQ
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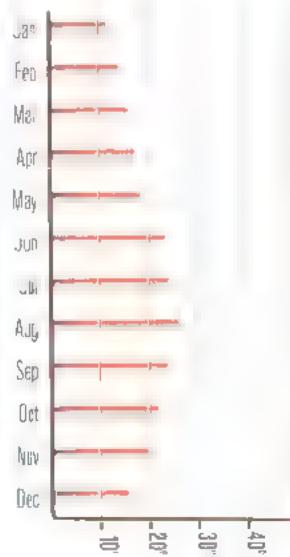
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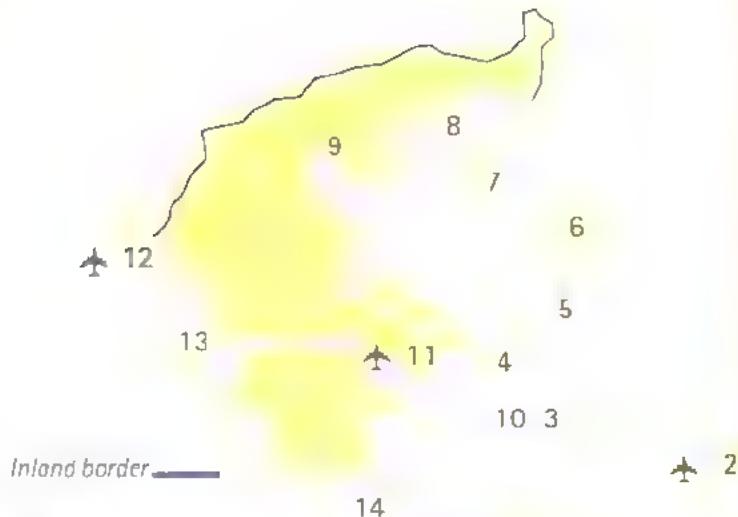
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Land Temp. (°C)

# Greece

- |             |              |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1 Crete     | 12 Corfu     |
| 2 Rhodes    | 13 Kefalonia |
| 3 Naxos     | 14 Cero      |
| 4 Andros    |              |
| 5 Chios     |              |
| 6 Lesvos    |              |
| 7 Lemnos    |              |
| 8 Thasos    |              |
| 9 Salonica  |              |
| 10 Cyclades |              |
| 11 Athens   |              |



**How to get there** → Most of the main tourist islands have international airports and others have frequent ferry services operating from the mainland and other islands. Choose your destination and pick a tour operator who can get you there, or fly to Athens independently and take a ferry to one of the country's 444 ports!

**Entry requirements** → A full passport only

**Climate** → In Summer Greece is hot and dry – too hot for some – but in the winter storms hit the coastlines. Some island groups have a cooling summer breeze though.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Greek, although in the tourist areas all European languages are understood.

**Currency** → Drachma

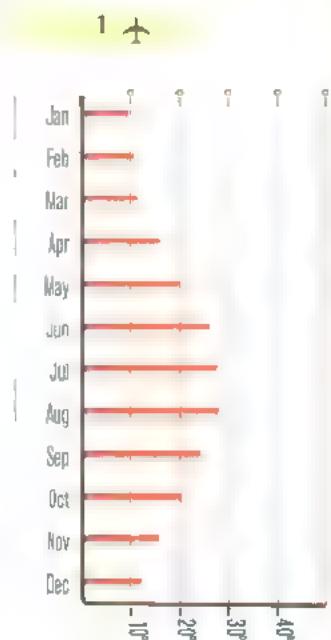
**Tourist Authority** → Greek Tourist Board, 4 Conduit Street, London W1R 0DJ. Tel 0171 734 5997.

## The country

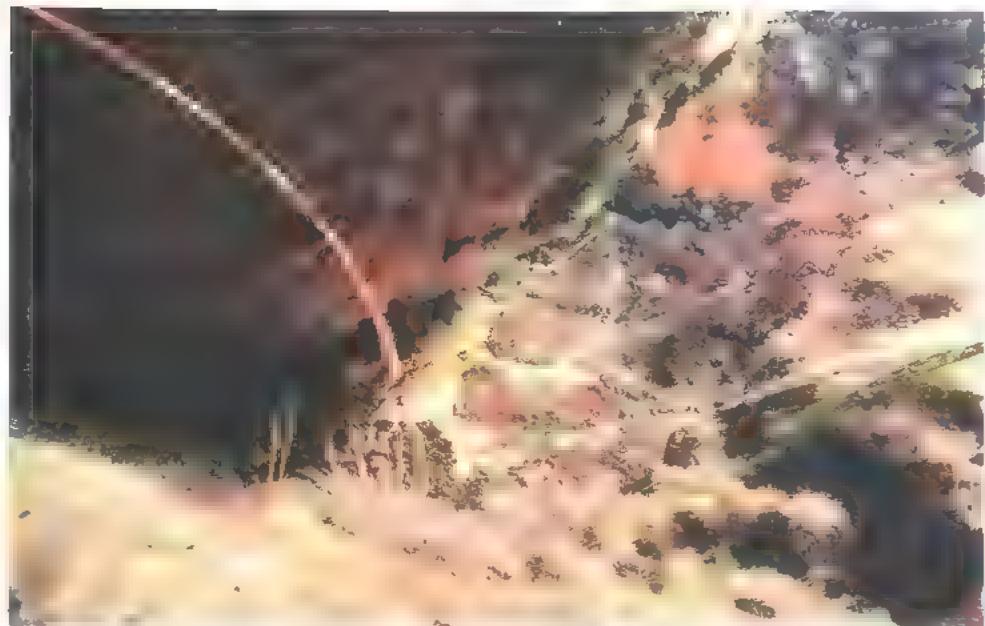
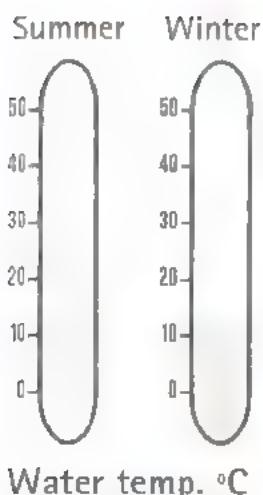
Greece is more a favourite of the strip-off and lie-on-the-beach brigade than anything else, but it has much more to offer than a sunny climate and nightclubs. The nation is the southern part of the Balkan peninsula with a mountainous, wild mainland and a host of islands scattered across the Aegean, Ionian and Cretan Seas in the Mediterranean. Of the 2000 islands, only around 10 per cent are inhabited – the rest are no more than rocky outcrops or barren wastelands.

The islands are grouped into regions – the Cyclades, the Dodecanese, the North-Eastern Aegean, the Sporades and the Saronic Gulf islands. Crete and Evia, two of the country's largest islands, are on their own.

The holiday destinations have been established for several years and offer every kind of accommodation, restaurant and other facilities. Some of the more lively resorts can be a bit too much unless you are 20 and out for a good time, but there are plenty of quiet retreats. The countryside is always pleasant, but dry. There are always plenty of bars and restaurants around, even in small villages.



Land Temp. (°C)



## The diving

When it comes to diving, Greece is really a nation of discovery. For a long time the Greek Department of Underwater Archaeology frowned upon recreational scuba diving because of fear for their ancient wonders beneath the waves. Greece still has hundreds of sites marked for archaeological study, and still more yet to be discovered.

The most popular areas include Crete, Rhodes and the Aegean coast. Of these, Crete is one of the most well geared for diving and three years ago, nine new dive areas on the west coast were added to its attractions.

A couple of these sites are scattered with 2000 year old amphorae. Many of these ancient pots are nearly intact and lie in only a few metres of water. The amphorae sites are absolutely fascinating, especially if you are interested in ancient Greek artefacts. Amphorae were used by the ancient Greeks and Romans as storage pots and were used extensively on merchant vessels. Many of the merchant ships sank in winter storms and are now simply awaiting discovery by divers. Some sites are well known and dived, but thankfully the dive guides do not allow the pots to be broken.

But the most spectacular dives are the caves. There are several systems open to divers, but they are really only for those with plenty of experience. You are dealing with overhead environments and should ensure you know the specific requirements for this sort of diving.

The caves themselves are open to the outside world and you can always see the entrance, so they are more like caverns than caves. The walls are painted with pink encrusting sponges and provide a dramatic scene.

The Aegean Sea has hosted a couple of underwater archaeological seminars because of its underwater ancient wreck sites. Most of these areas are off limits to recreational divers, but you can still find the odd broken amphora from time to time.

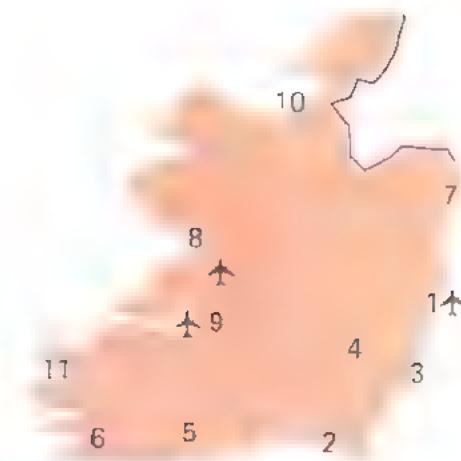
The Aegean coastline is again rocky and the underwater scenery is very dramatic. Marine life is good here and includes octopus, numerous small fish and quite a few groupers.

Other islands do offer diving, but are less well known. Diving facilities in Greece are usually good and offer a host of services as well as try dives and training.

# Ireland

- 1 Dublin
- 2 Waterford
- 3 Arklow
- 4 Carlow
- 5 Cork
- 6 Bantry
- 7 Dundalk
- 8 Galway
- 9 Limerick
- 10 Sligo Bay
- 11 Dingle Bay

Inland border



**How to get there** → You can easily reach Ireland on a ferry or by plane.

Ferry routes include Fishguard to Rosslare and Holyhead to Dublin. Flights can be taken from most airports to either Dublin, Shannon or Knock from many British airports

**Entry requirements** → None

**Climate** → Changeable, but very much like the UK

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → English and Gaelic

**Currency** → The Irish pound

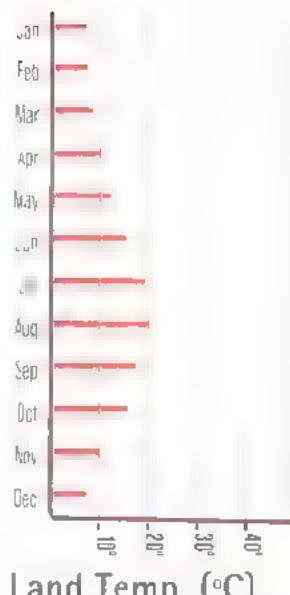
**Tourist Authority** → Irish Tourist Board, 150 New Bond Street, London W1Y 0AQ. Tel 0171 493 3201.

## The country

Southern Ireland is a beautiful country with a rugged look. The hills are green and forested in places, the mountains are picturesque and the people are warm and friendly. It is an extremely picturesque country, especially on the rugged west coast that looks out onto the Atlantic Ocean.

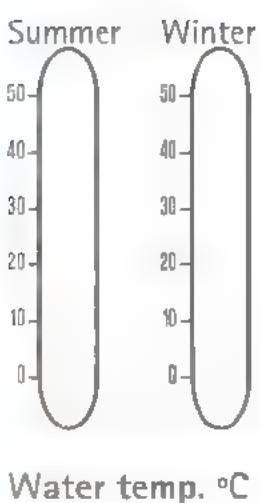
The roads are good and many are newly built, thanks to money from EC grants, so getting about isn't a problem. Accommodation is easy to find with many good, clean and reasonably priced B+B's, guest houses and hotels. The tourist industry has mainly catered for sightseers, Americans trying to retrace their roots and fishermen, but these days niche markets such as scuba diving are blossoming and getting much more attention than they do in the UK.

The best place to head for is the west and south coasts, which have a number of good dive facilities all the way down from the border, which could very soon disappear anyway thanks to the newly agreed peace accord.





This coastline is dotted with small villages and towns which all go about life at an easy pace. Ireland really is the green jewel it is so often described as and a perfect place to visit.



## The diving

Many of Ireland's dive centres have formed into a federation and are supported and approved by the tourist board. Collectively they are known as Discover Underwater Ireland and each centre offers a wealth of dive sites and experience.

The diving itself is generally in the Atlantic Ocean although for the most part it is either near the shore or off the many small islands that fan out from the western side of the country. The rocky bottom and clean oceanic water means that the visibility is usually excellent, although after heavy rain or during plankton blooms the vis is almost as bad as the UK. Diving is generally scenic and is based on either the marine life, the topography or a combination of the two.

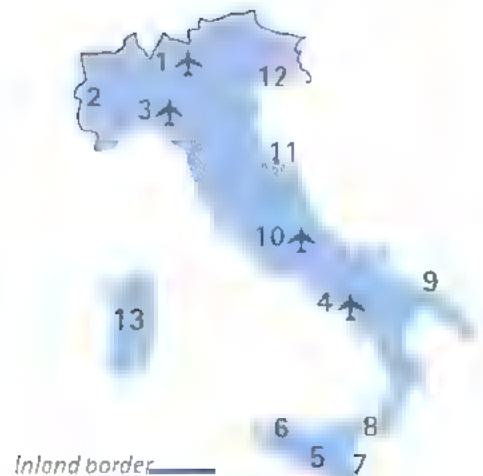
You have canyons, walls, tunnels, cliff faces, pinnacles and gullies to investigate. Most are smothered in static life and visited by a multitude of fish life. Dogfish are very commonly seen in these waters as are shoals of pollock and cod. Large wrasse are abundant and the kelp is so rich that it is impossible to count all the smaller life forms that flourish in this remarkable ecosystem. Pods of bottlenose dolphins are often encountered during boat trips and down at Dingle on the south coast you have the chance to snorkel with one particularly friendly individual, known as Freddy.

Most of the diving is from boats, but there are a few shore dives in the many lochs and one or two harbours, although these tend only to be used as a last resort if the weather is too bad for the open sea. Many centres are still discovering new sites but there are literally hundreds to choose from already.

To attract more divers from the UK, many centres in the Discover Underwater Ireland group have produced diving packages which include ferry charges or airline flights. These are brilliant deals and make a trip over to Ireland even more worthwhile.

# Italy

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1 Milan       | 12 Venice   |
| 2 Turin       | 13 Sardinia |
| 3 Genoa       |             |
| 4 Naples      |             |
| 5 Sicily      |             |
| 6 Palermo     |             |
| 7 Catania     |             |
| 8 Messina     |             |
| 9 Bari        |             |
| 10 Rome       |             |
| 11 San Marino |             |



**How to get there** → There are several airports in Italy serviced by airlines from the UK. For the Italian Riviera, you need Genoa, which is quite expensive or Milan, which is cheaper. Otherwise you are best flying into either Rome or Naples. Of course, you can always drive to Italy. It is quite a way, but seeing as we are all in the EU, getting through borders these days is easy.

**Entry requirements** → Passport

**Climate** → Italy has a beautiful climate for most of the year. Even in the north it never gets too cold even in winter, unless you are in the mountains, where the skiing is excellent. Diving conditions are governed by weather patterns of course and the winter does tend to be a little stormy in places in the first half of the year and the visibility is reduced.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Italian

**Currency** → Lira

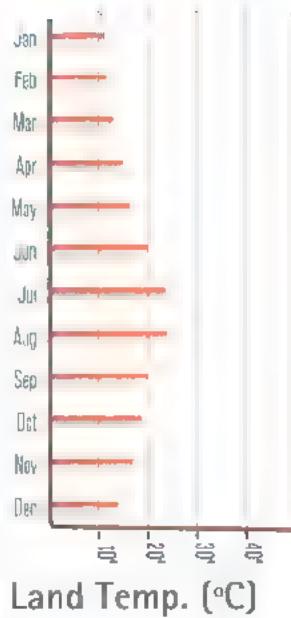
**Tourist Authority** → Italian Tourist Board, 1 Prince's Street, London W1R 8AY. Tel 0171 408 1254.

## The country

Italy has always been a favourite destination for the British. The ancient culture, the food and the wine are all big attractions.

The country can basically be split in two. The southern half is rural, a land of olive groves and vineyards while the north is the country's richer industrial centre. All over Italy though you will find ancient cities such as Venice, Verona, Padua and, of course, Rome. In short, the country is a mix of history and vibrance.

The people too are full of life. They have a love for the finest things from clothes to music and art to food and wine. Italian wine is divine and the food is world famous – you haven't eaten pasta until you have tried it in Italy.



As countries go, it's modern, clean and efficient. It has good transport links and it's easy for tourists to move around but, as in many other European countries, the motorways are not free. You have to pay to use them and what's more some teeter on the edge of some rather spectacular drop offs, around the rugged coastline.

Mainland Italy is the giant leg kicking the island of Sicily into the Med, but there are several smaller offshore islands which are worth visiting, especially as a diver. Sardinia and Capri are two examples and both offer some very good diving and holiday opportunities.



Water temp. °C

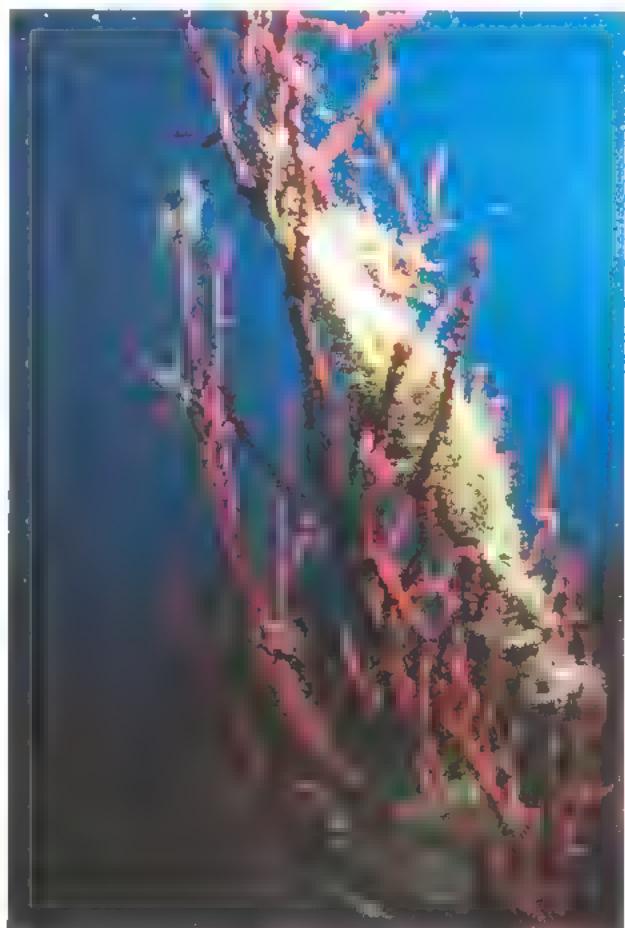
## The diving

Scuba diving in Italy, as in Britain, is an institution. It caught on at about the same time as it did here and the Italian Federation of Divers (similar to our British Sub Aqua Club) still has a firm hold over much of the country. But PADI, the Professional Association of Diving Instructors, is making inroads providing an infrastructure of dive centres open to all divers.

You can dive just about anywhere around the coast of Italy, but some places are better than others and some have better, more convenient facilities.

Starting in the north on the Italian Riviera around Genoa, the Portofino coast attracts most of the divers who come to see the beauties of the nature reserve at Santa Margherita

Much of this northern stretch of the Mediterranean is full of life and exhibits some curious characteristics. For example, in the summer the warmer surface waters – down to about 20m – are warm enough to support moray eels which can be found in the many crevices, but below the thermocline the water temperature drops to around 15° or less and conger eels are found –



# Italy

two species of eel in one place.

Other wonders include a massive amount of red fan corals below about 25m. The rocky walls are covered in them. With the naked eye they look black, but when lit with a torch or a flash, the true vibrant colour shows through.

The topography of the Mediterranean stays fairly similar all around the coast – rocky – and it provides a very good base for a profusion of fish and invertebrate life. Unfortunately, Italian divers also love to spearfish and as in much of the Med, large fish just aren't to be found in any great numbers. This is a shame because the ones that are seen are beautiful. Another experience of the Portofino area is ocean sunfish which come into the bay during the summer. Why, no one really knows, but it is one of the very few places in the world you can spot them with any degree of certainty.

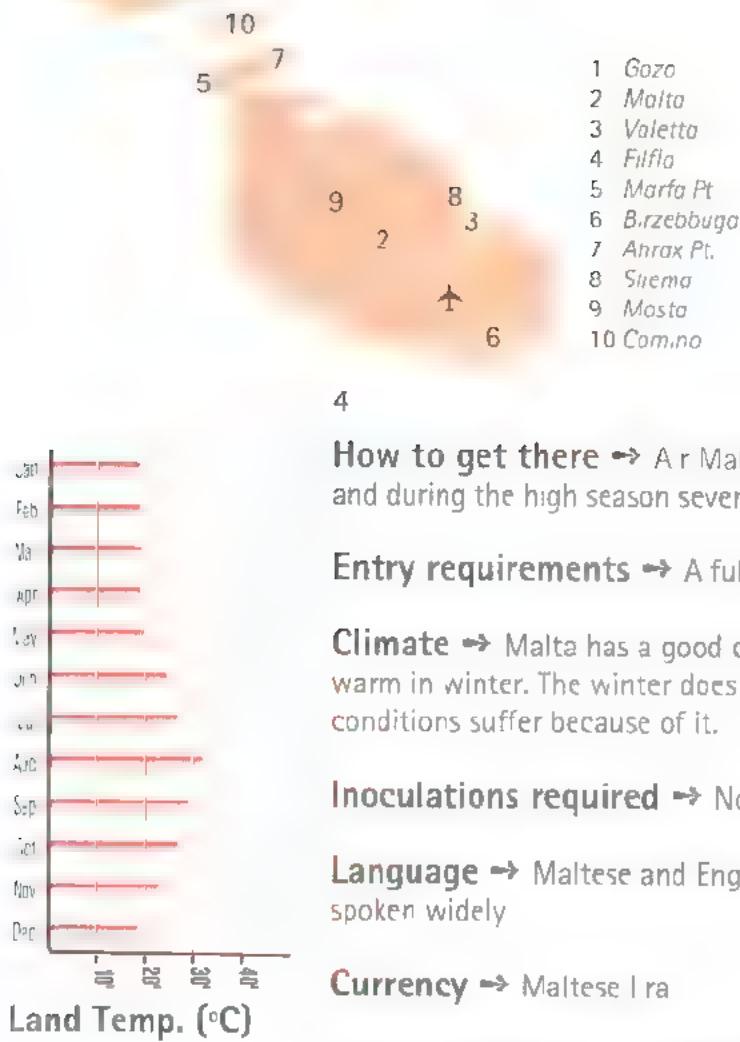
Further down the western coastline are the islands of Sardinia and Capri; both classic Mediterranean islands, which offer the diver a profusion of life and several very good wrecks.

Wrecks do play a big part in Italy's diving agenda. Many are beyond safe diving limits, but some notable ones are within reach. These include various wartime ships, merchant ships and vessels from all centuries. Because of the lack of strong tides in the enclosed Mediterranean, more delicate wrecks such as planes do not get smashed to bits as they do around the British coast so, there are a number of British and German warplanes to be found. Again some are too deep, but others are just within reach.

On the southern tip lies the island of Sicily, which has the benefit of being out in the blue sea and attracts larger numbers of pelagic species, including tuna at the right time of year.

As dive destinations go, Italy isn't ranked very high. This is rather unjustified because it offers an incredible diversity of opportunities. It has a good diving infrastructure, and PADI dive centres/resorts are springing up in the better spots. Many divers are perhaps put off by the cost of a European diving holiday when they can dive the same sea for less money in a third world country. Italy may not be cheap, but it is more than just a diving holiday – you get masses of culture and a clean environment too.





**How to get there** → Air Malta has regular flights from London Heathrow, and during the high season several charter flights also make the trip.

**Entry requirements** → A full passport

**Climate** → Malta has a good climate which is hot during the summer and warm in winter. The winter does tend to be a bit breezy at times and diving conditions suffer because of it.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Maltese and English are the official languages yet Italian is spoken widely

**Currency** → Maltese Lira

**Tourist Authority** → Malta Tourist Office, Malta House, 36-38 Piccadilly, London W1V 0PP. Tel 0171 292 4900.

## The country

Malta is a cross between a typical Mediterranean country and a British one. It's a small archipelago off the southern tip of Italy, which has been a British stronghold since the time of the Crusades, although it has also been dominated by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, the Normans, Spanish and French as well.

There are two main islands – Malta and Gozo – although between them are Comino and the islet of Cominotto. The nation has been a holiday destination for the Brits and the rest of Europe for a long time and the tourist industry is well established.

Religion plays a big part in the island's life and 98 per cent of the population follow the Roman Catholic faith. This is seen in the many tiny shrines and statues of the Virgin Mary dotted along the roadsides and even underwater.

## The diving

The diving here is quite tightly controlled and all divers – local and visitors – must have a valid medical certificate and proof of qualification in order to get permission to use scuba equipment. This may sound overly officious, but it has more to do with safety than with red tape.

The diving season is considered to be year round, although several centres close during the slack winter season. The weather at this time of year can be calm and warmish, but storms can hit here so a dive trip can be a bit hit and

# Malta

miss in bad years.

The diving itself is characterised by the island's topography. The rocky landscape is mimicked underwater and the diver is greeted by a host of walls, reefs, tunnels, caverns and archways.

The Maltese government and dive centres are working hard to bring the fish, and although you will never stop the Maltese, who are avid hunters, from spearfishing, these days they cannot use scuba gear and are restricted to snorkelling on such expeditions. It is also heartening to see recent pictures from Malta showing the fish are returning.

Malta is quite well endowed with wrecks. For starters, there is the tug boat, *Razi*, which sits to the north of Marfa Point and was sunk deliberately.

Other metallic attractions include the *HMS Moari*, a heroine of the second world war. Although not the best dive on the islands, due to the lack of excellent visibility, the *HMS Moari* is one of the most historic and any dive on her should not take place until you have her full story. A good recount is found in Ned Middleton's *Maltese Islands Diving Guide* published by Swan HI.

Many of Malta's dive sites are shore based, although some do require a bit of a swim to reach them. Off-shore sites include the wreck of a submarine, a British naval vessel and an old barge and a British bomber. Malta is also said to be the last resting place of a number of wooden warships.

Gozo also has some outstanding sites, none quite as historic as its larger brother, but many a lot more geologically interesting. For example you

cannot dive Gozo without a trip to the Blue Hole, not a true Blue Hole is a sunken volcanic cave, but a strange rock formation carved out by the sea. Other sites on Gozo feature caves, gullies and a spectacular archway at double Arch Reef

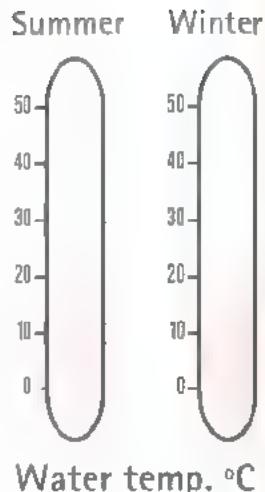
Deep diving is quite common here, but there are places with extremely interesting terrain that are very shallow. The shallow sites are the best

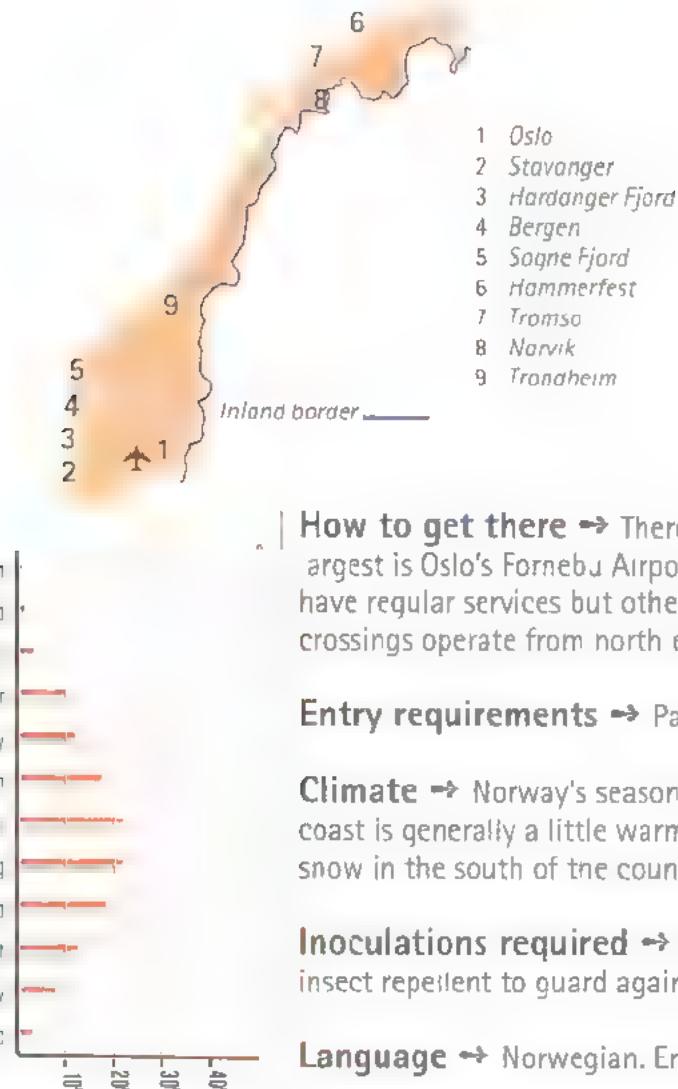
when looking for caverns and tunnels

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Email: info@digigate.net www.digigate.net/calypso





**How to get there** → There are number of airports in Norway, but the largest is Oslo's Fornebu Airport. SAS, British Airways and British Midlands have regular services but other airlines make the journey as well. Long ferry crossings operate from north east England.

**Entry requirements** → Passport

**Climate** → Norway's seasons are the same as the UK's only cooler. The coast is generally a little warmer and in winter experiences more rain than snow in the south of the country.

**Inoculations required** → None, although you may want to take some insect repellent to guard against midges during the summer months.

**Language** → Norwegian. English is widely understood.

**Currency** → Norwegian krone

**Tourist Authority** → Norwegian Tourist Board 20 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 4LR. Tel 0171 839 6255.

## The country

Norway is, the western part of the Scandinavian peninsula and has borders with Sweden, Finland and Russia. As with many a pine countries, Norway is extremely beautiful. It is a land of pine forests, mountain ranges and, of course, fjords.

The country has a long history although it only became independent from Sweden at the start of this century. There are indications that man first settled Norway in 1200BC. The Vikings came from here and many of these Nordic warriors ransacked the north of England; these days they just come for the shopping.

Oslo is the country's capital and has been since the mid-14th century. The city is located at the head of Oslofjord and has a beautiful mix of old and new buildings. The original town was burned to the ground in 1624, but was rebuilt in brick and stone soon after. The city has a wealth of tourist attractions and is on the European city must-see list for many visitors from overseas.

But not even Oslo's beauty can match the natural wonders Norway offers. Glaciers are a dominating feature of the wilderness in Norway's central region. Much of the country is above the Arctic circle and therefore Norway boasts Europe's most northerly city, Tromsø. Called the Gateway to

# Norway

the Arctic, the city is nestled within a stunning snow-capped mountain vista that provides a scenic backdrop most cities would die for.

And if Tromsø is the most northerly city, then Hammerfest is the world's most northerly town. This is probably one of the best places to see the magic of the northern lights.

The country has several national parks where wild reindeer graze, wolves roam and lemmings can be found. And add all that to huge snow capped mountains and beautiful pine forests, fast flowing rivers and streams – Norway is picture postcard stuff. About a third of the country is still forested, although more and more of the trees are dying off because of acid rain pollution.

## The diving

Norway's fjord-carved coastline provides a staggering 1500 miles of potential dive sites. Much of the western shoreline is touched by the waters of the Gulf Stream and so the climate along the coastal region is much more temperate than many expect. In winter the water rarely freezes and in the summer it can reach 20°C on the surface.

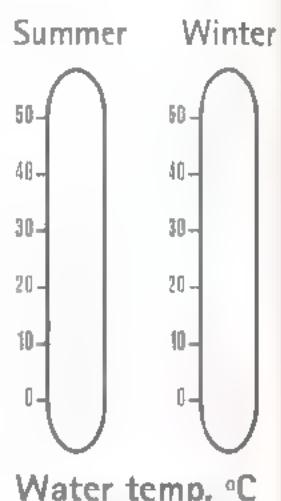
Huge forests of kelp grow in some regions, with the stretch from Bergen to Lofoten being the best.

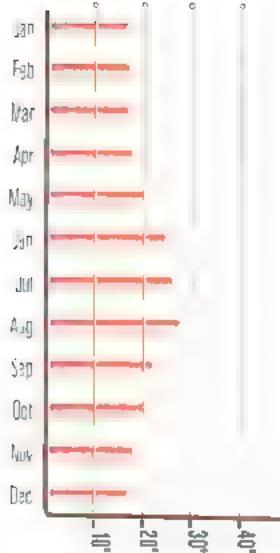
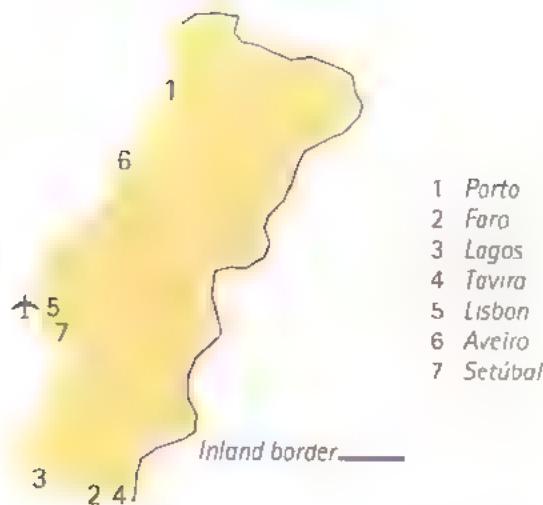
Norway does very nicely for underwater wildlife. All the usual North Sea fish are found in these waters, with the added delights of seals, the occasional killer whale and humpback sightings and recently a huge lobster-like creature known as the russrekrabbe has migrated east from Russian waters.

At certain times of the year the visibility can reach a staggering 50m, although 10-20m is more usual. But some areas can be disappointing. The waters in fjords with large settlements can be affected by pollution and it is best to avoid the inner parts of Oslofjord.

Wrecks are one of the most popular dive sites and Norway has a good selection to choose from. There are certain rules governing wreck diving here, which divers should obey. The most sensible is a look-but-do-not-touch policy.

Water movement around the coast is substantial and currents can be strong, making drift diving popular. It is, however, best to do this with a good local dive guide. There are numerous dive shops in Norway and many are pleased to show divers around.





## Land Temp. (°C)

**How to get there** → In the Summer, getting to Portugal is cheapest by charter flight, although there are several scheduled flights per week. It is also possible to drive here through France and Spain.

**Entry requirements** → A passport

**Climate** → Portugal has hot summers and the lowlands have warmish winters, although storms from the Atlantic frequently hit the coast at this time of year.

**Inoculations required** → None

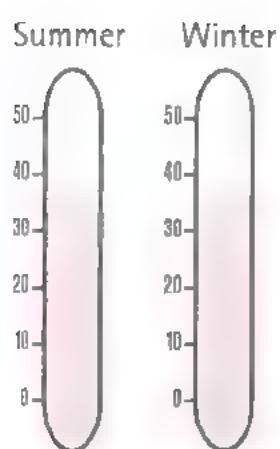
**Language** → Portuguese

**Currency** → Escudo

**Tourist Authority** → Portuguese Tourist Office, 2nd Floor, 22-25a Sackville Street, London W1X 2LY. Tel 0171 494 1441.

## The country

Portugal is another of Europe's holiday hot spots. Every summer hoards of Europeans descend on its beaches and coves and hunt inland for its culture and heritage. It is a beautiful country with a rugged coastline that has been beaten out by millions of years of pounding Atlantic waves.



## Water temp. °C

## The diving

The diving services in Portugal are pretty sparse and most Brits who come here head for Portugal's short southern coastline, the Algarve. The diving isn't spectacular, but it is enjoyable and there's plenty to be had. The entire length of the 120 miles of Algarve coast is pretty shallow, in fact it doesn't get much deeper than 35m within about a mile of the shoreline. This means that almost any part of the coast will offer a huge amount of potential.

There are a few wrecks and rocky reefs along the coastline and plenty of them are covered in life.

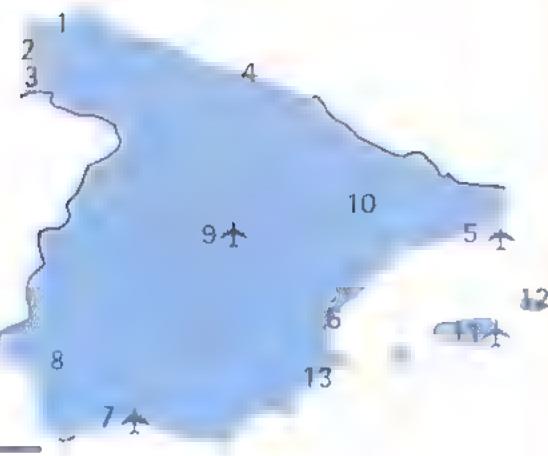
Because of the attack by the Atlantic every winter, the coast has a collection of caves, caverns and idyllic bays. There are also plenty of drop-offs, pinnacles and pretty gullies.

Surprisingly, fish life is quite good all along the coast and is often bolstered by octopus and lobsters. At certain times of the year sardines congregate and huge shoals can be seen in places but this is a big time for fishing, so care is needed as fishermen and divers don't mix too well.

# Spain

- |                          |                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 <i>La Coruña</i>       | 12 <i>Menorca</i>  |
| 2 <i>Cape Finisterre</i> | 13 <i>Alicante</i> |
| 3 <i>Vigo</i>            |                    |
| 4 <i>Bilbao</i>          |                    |
| 5 <i>Barcelona</i>       |                    |
| 6 <i>Valencia</i>        |                    |
| 7 <i>Málaga</i>          |                    |
| 8 <i>Seville</i>         |                    |
| 9 <i>Madrid</i>          |                    |
| 10 <i>Zaragoza</i>       |                    |
| 11 <i>Majorca</i>        |                    |

*Inland border*



**How to get there** → The Canaries, The Balearics and the Costa Brava are the three main Spanish dive areas. Each have international airports well served by charter flights from most UK airports. The nearest airport to the best diving on the Costa Brava is at Girona.

**Entry requirements** → All you need is a passport.

**Climate** → Spain has a climate similar to the UK's, although it is warmer and drier. The southern part of the country and the islands have warmer conditions than the north. The Canaries have a milder winter climate than mainland Spain.

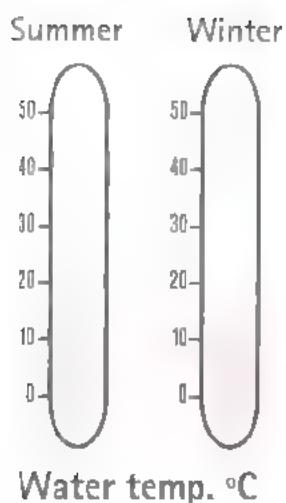
**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Spanish

**Currency** → Peseta

**Tourist Authority** → Spanish Tourist Office, 57 St James Street, London SW1A 1LD. Tel 0171 499 0901.





## The country

The three main Spanish diving destinations are the Balearic island of Menorca, the Medes Islands off the Costa Brava and the three Canary islands of Lanzarote, Tenerife and Fuerteventura. Menorca and the Medes Islands are in the Mediterranean while the Canaries are in the Atlantic off the coast of Africa.

They are all popular holiday destinations and offer a range of accommodation and tourist facilities that cater more for the package holiday-maker, but equally suit a diver's needs.

The advantage for mixed diving and non-diving groups is that non-divers will find plenty to occupy them. It's not a holiday where they have to sit on the boat and watch for bubbles.

Menorca is a very pretty island with picturesque bays and beautiful seascapes. The island is 30 miles long by 15 miles wide and of mainly limestone origin. It is renowned as a quiet holiday retreat. There are several





resort towns around the coast, but only a few have dive centres. It doesn't really matter which centre you opt for when it comes to dive site because they all tend to visit the same ones anyway. It just means that some boat journeys are longer than others

The Medes Islands are a group of islands off the Costa Brava coast at L'Estartit on Spain's mainland. Meda Gran is the largest island, but there are six other islands and several islets. They actually lie about a mile off the coast and are a marine nature reserve.

You cannot stay on the islands, but being on a holiday coastline, L'Estartit offers a diverse range of accommodation and eateries. Transport out to the islands is easy.

The Canary group is actually nearer to Morocco than it's to Spain. Their atmosphere is very Spanish, but the islands' character is very different from its Mediterranean cousins. There are several islands in the group, but the three mentioned are the best for divers. They are all volcanic in origin and are covered in a strange rocky landscape and in places huge golden sand dunes dominate the scenery. Lanzarote is the most touristy, Tenerife is the most interesting and Fuerteventura is the most peaceful.

In the Summer, all are busy with tourists from across Europe, but out of season most of the areas, still excellent for diving and cheaper to visit.

## The diving

Menorca is well known as one of the jewels of Mediterranean diving. The island has numerous sheltered coves and a huge number of caverns and caves. This is one of the highlights of diving this island and it's what makes divers keep coming back. One of the most exciting systems is called Pont en Gil, which is a submerged cavern full of ancient stalagmites, stalactites and limestone columns. It is quite an easy dive as caverns go as you can see the exit point virtually all the time and there are only two sections that are truly overhead environments. The island has many other dives including several other cavern systems. Marine life is considered good and there are plenty of dive centres with British input, to make your stay here run smoothly.



The Medes Islands are one of the few marine reserves in the Mediterranean and, as such, haven't suffered the loss of fish seen elsewhere. Those who discover the islands say this is what Med diving used to be. The marine life is profuse and the fish life is unsurpassed. There are a number of restrictions on activities around the islands, but that doesn't include diving. What you have is a diver's paradise just off one of the most popular coasts in Spain. Day boats go out to the islands each day, but beware – so, too, do many other tourist vessels. There are several dive operations in L'Estartit and at least one is British run.



Diving the Canaries is slightly different in that you are diving in the Atlantic Ocean. It is yet another haven for divers and has been claimed as the lost Atlantis. Here you can find a mixture of outstanding marine life, incredible wrecks, excellent underwater photographic opportunities and some archaeology.

The underwater topography is volcanic, like the topside landscape, and therefore very dramatic. Marine life includes rays, cuttlefish, anemones, groupers, angel sharks and plenty of smaller fish species.

One of the most outstanding sites includes the wrecks outside the harbour in Lanzarote. A number of vessels have sunk in the same place over the years and they stretch from just below the surface to a depth of about 40m. A night dive at the old harbour wall is also another must. By contrast this is a shallow dive with a profusion of life.

On Tenerife there are a couple of ray feeding stations where stingrays and eagle rays can be hand fed. And on Fuerteventura there is a great grouper dive.

Dive operators on the islands are quite plentiful and several are British run. Spain's overall diving is incredibly diverse and well worth a look.

# Turkey

- 1 Bursa
- 2 Ankara
- 3 Izmir
- 4 Antalya
- 5 Adana
- 6 Kanya
- 7 Samsun
- 8 Erzurum
- 9 Fethiye
- 10 Marmaris
- 11 Bodrum



**How to get there** → There are numerous charter flights and cheap holiday deals into Turkey. Look for flights into Dalaman and Bodrum airports for the best diving areas.

**Entry requirements** → A passport and an entrance visa which has to be paid for in English currency on landing. Check the cost with the tourist authority or your travel agent.

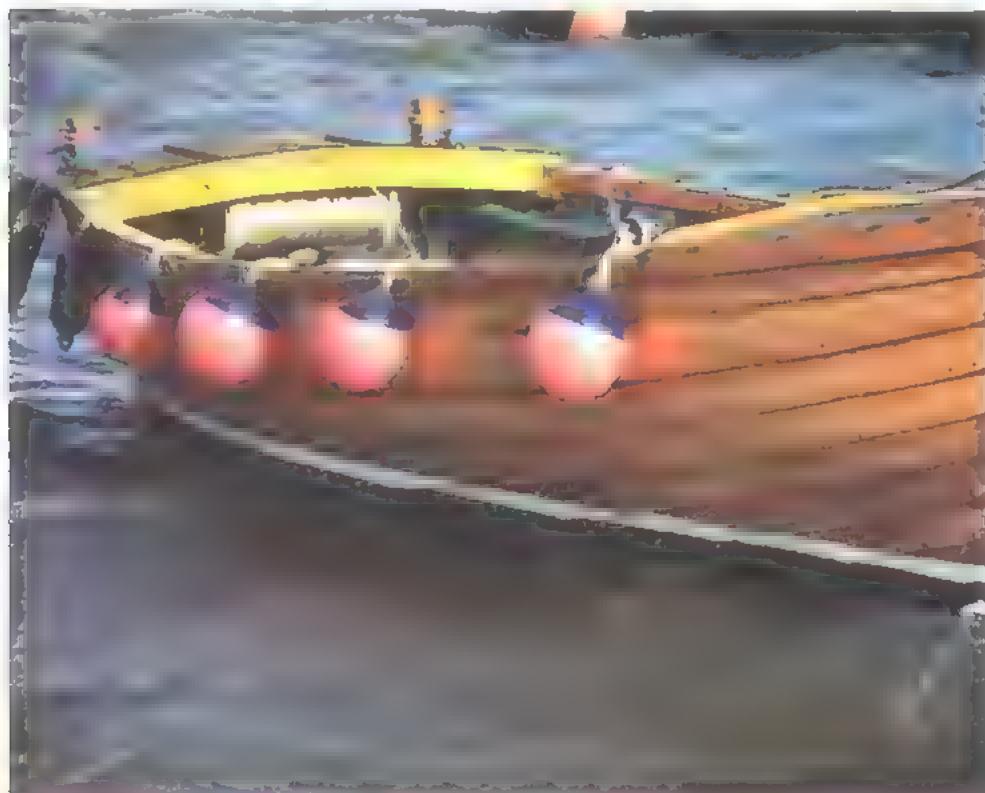
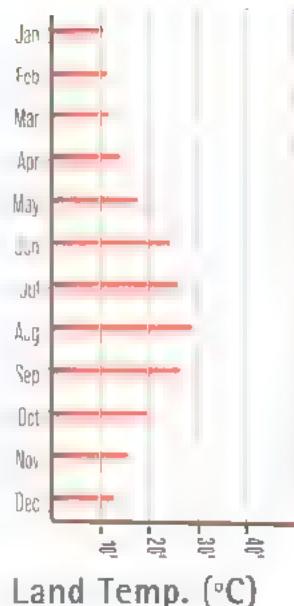
**Climate** → In summer Turkey is hot, very hot, and in winter it is quite warm, although storms do hit hard.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Turkish, although English is understood in the holiday resorts.

**Currency** → Turkish lira

**Tourist Authority** → Turkish Tourist Office 1st Floor, 170-173 Piccadilly, London W1V 9DD.



# Turkey



Water temp. °C

## The country

Turkey is a land of surprises. It is a place where you become an instant millionaire (a lira millionaire at least), a place of rugged beauty and a variety of climate ranges. Although thought of as a hot spot, much of the country is well above sea level and encounters long tough winters. It has highlands of lush greenery, dry plains and a rugged arid coastal zone.

It is the country where East meets West, the land of Istanbul, rich and ancient culture and the earth which bought us the tulip, the cherry and the apricot.

In summer the coastal resorts are brimming with European travellers, backpackers and holiday-makers. In the last few years the package holiday has moved into Turkey with a vengeance thanks mainly to the favourable exchange rate, the summer sun, welcoming Turks and the warm Mediterranean Sea.

Turkey has coasts on three bodies of water – the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Mediterranean. Most of the resorts are found along the Aegean and Mediterranean coast, although in the last few years Turkey has been developing the tourist industry on the part of the island of Cyprus they claimed in 1974.

## The diving

Turkey's main diving centres are Bodrum, Fethiye and Marmaris. There are some excellent dive centres here, mostly British run, which offer all the services a diver needs. Most of the diving is done from traditional day boats where lunch and



# Turkey

entertainment is provided, although last year saw the advent of Turkey's first liveaboard. The diving takes place in a number of rocky coves and is a mix of wildlife watching, scenic and historical. Creatures found in the far eastern Mediterranean include octopus, huge tiger rays, jacks, morays and hundreds of smaller fish. The topography is volcanic in origin and, therefore, the rocky bottom has plenty of nooks, crannies and small caverns for divers to explore.

Dotted around this coastline are a number of ancient wreck sites which are protected by law and divers visiting the sites which are open – many are off limits – must be accompanied by a Turkish divemaster. All the dive centres have these people in their employ anyway.

Many of the wrecks are over 2000 years old, so not much is left, except for the amphorae, which lie scattered about the bottom. If you are lucky you can even find an intact example.

Much of the coastline has already been explored, but a new centre, owned by the already well-established European Diving Centre, based in Marmaris has recently started to explore this new stretch of coastline.

New sites are being discovered regularly and so Turkey continues to attract divers back year after year for a holiday that does not break the bank. Turkey is a brilliant place to dive and an excellent and safe place to learn to dive.

## Dive Centres



**Aquaventure Ltd**  
The Water's Edge, Mellieha  
Bay Hotel, Chadira,  
SPB10, Malta  
Tel: 00356  
522141/522356  
Fax: 00356 521053  
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Route De Moby Dick,  
20137 P.V. France  
Tel: 003349 57 02267  
Fax: 003349 570 7008

**Calypso Diving Centre**  
Maralforn Bay Seafront,  
Gozo, Malta  
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**Dive Charters Gibraltar**  
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PADI. Dive trips for singles  
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## Dive Centres

### Dive Systems Aquamarina

Expo-Qui-Si Sana  
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Tel: 00356 319 123  
Fax: 00356 342 040  
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Fax: 00356 552 056  
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### European Diving Centre, Turkey

MBE Box no: 3 K ENGIN  
BUL. No 47 Marmaris,  
Mugla, Turkey  
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Fax: 0090 252 4554734  
or PK 26-48301 Fethiye,  
Mugla, Turkey  
Tel: 0090 252 6149771  
Fax: 0090 252 6149772  
E-mail:  
[europeandiving@superonline.com](mailto:europeandiving@superonline.com)  
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### Moby Dives

Tradewind Building Triq  
I Gostra, Xlendi Bay, Gozo  
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Estartit, Girona, Spain  
Tel: 0034 972 751 768  
Fax: 0034 972 750 539  
E-mail:  
[unisub@redestbes](mailto:unisub@redestbes)

Web site:  
<http://www.joves.com/unisub/index.htm>  
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reserve of Medes Islands,  
diving courses from  
beginner through to  
instructor, snorkelling, try  
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flights etc.

## Tour Operators

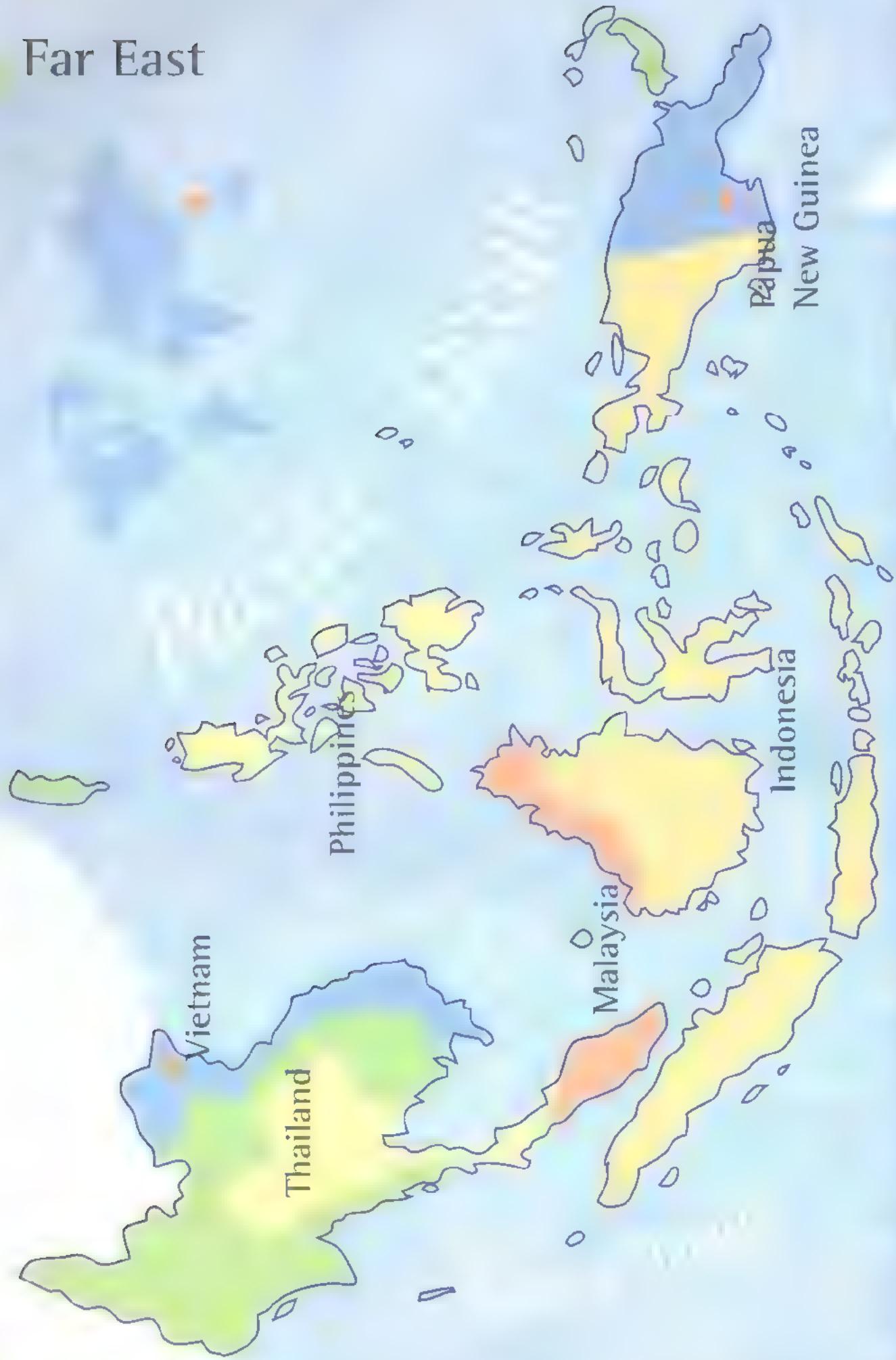
### Scubaway

- 01273 746261

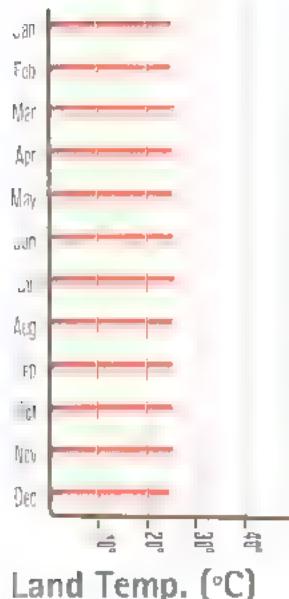
### Tony Backhurst

- 01483 271765

# Far East



# Indonesia



**How to get there** ➤ Most international flights from Britain arrive at either Jakarta, the capital, or Denpasar on Bali. The national airline is Garuda Indonesia, but many other airlines run scheduled flights.

**Entry requirements** ➤ For travellers arriving by air or a registered port of entry for stays of 60 days or less no visa is required. If you are entering the country via a non-conventional route – for example, overland from Sarawak to Kalimantan on the island of Borneo, you will be issued with a shorter, non-extendible, visa.

**Climate** ➤ The climate is tropical with hot balmy days and nights. There are only two distinct seasons and both are hot: one is hot and dry (April to October), the other is hot and wet (November to March).

**Inoculations required** ➤ Hepatitis A+B, tetanus, polio, typhoid and anti-malarials.

**Language** ➤ Bahasa Indonesia is the official language, which is very similar to Malay (the Malaysian dialect). English is widely spoken although in some parts it has an Australian twang to it.

**Currency** ➤ Indonesia's legal tender is the rupiah.

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Indonesian Tourist Office, 3-4 Hanover Street, London W1 9HH Tel 0171 493 0030



# Indonesia

## The country

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago and contains some of the most untouched land on the planet. The islands vary greatly in size from the giant Sumatra and Java to the tiny Bali, Komodo and Flores. Indonesia also shares parts of other islands such as Borneo and Irian Jaya (the other half of which is part of Papua New Guinea). Spread over such a wide expanse of ocean and straddling the Equator, the nation encompasses many different cultures, landscapes and religions.

Java has one of the world's largest populations of Muslims, but on Bali, only a short boat ride away, the main religion is Hindu. Other religions to be found include Buddhism and Christianity, which feature throughout the islands.

Much of Indonesia is rain forest and it's only really Java and Bali that have incorporated any western culture into their society. Islands such as Sumatra, Sulawesi and the Timors, for example, are all fairly unexploited and so make the perfect destination for the more adventurous traveller.

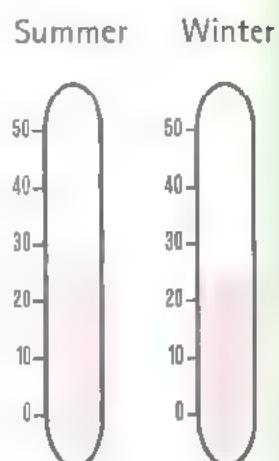
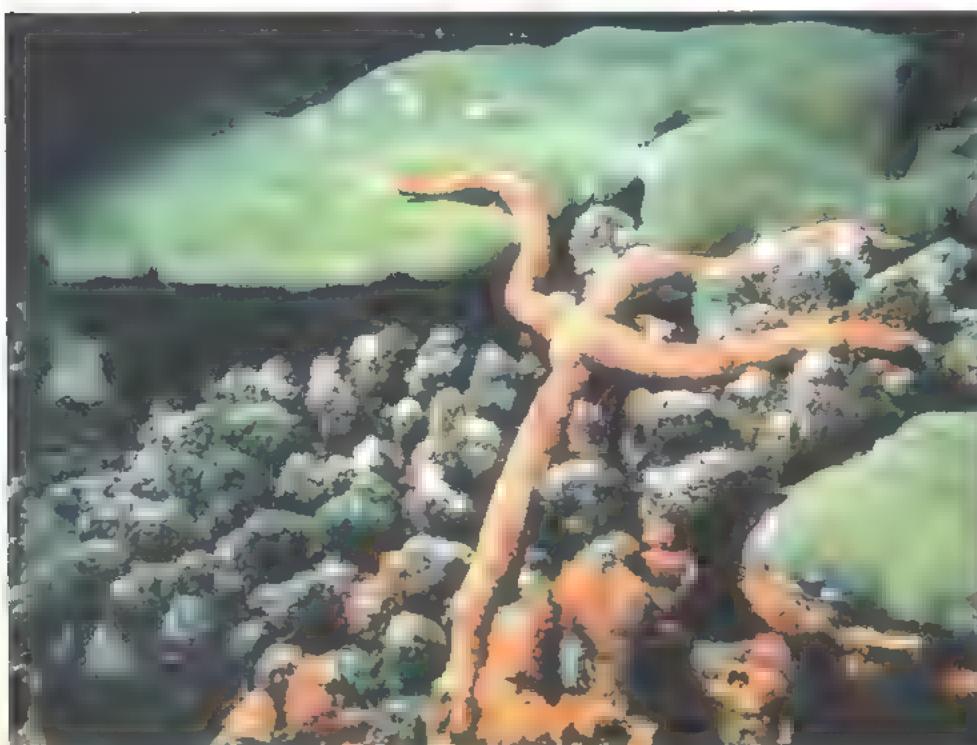
With 13,677 islands spread across three time zones, getting around Indonesia can, at times, be rather frustrating. Java and Bali have good road systems and Java has an efficient railway, but leave the beaten track and you are in the wilderness.

You can take a rainforest trek in Sumatra or, if you want to get away from everything and have the ultimate beach holiday, any one of the islands east of Bali, will be perfect.

Other worthwhile experiences for the traveller in Indonesia include a visit to the Island of Komodo to see real dragons, white water rafting in Java and Bali and a visit to an orang-utan sanctuary in the heart of the Borneo jungle.

## The diving

As in other parts of South East Asia, the diving in Indonesia has its popular, well-structured areas and its adventurous, undiscovered territories catering for the rough-it-and-tough-it brigade.



Water temp. °C

The one thing you will undoubtedly discover is that diving here is a lot more relaxed than in the west. The equipment is of a generally lower standard and the diving facilities available are also much less refined than in many other parts of the world. Dive guides are generally local and use English only as a second language, so don't expect too much in the way of a dive briefing and always be prepared to ask questions rather than expect information to be given to you. Safety equipment is also fairly limited as are sophisticated boats. Usually the dive boats are nothing more than converted fishing vessels. All this adds to the adventure, but care is required on your part.

There is nothing dangerous about the operations, you just have to know what you are doing. However, in the more out-lying islands around Sulawesi there are some top notch outfits run by Europeans and Americans. Such resorts include Manado, Kungkungan Bay and Tukang Besi.

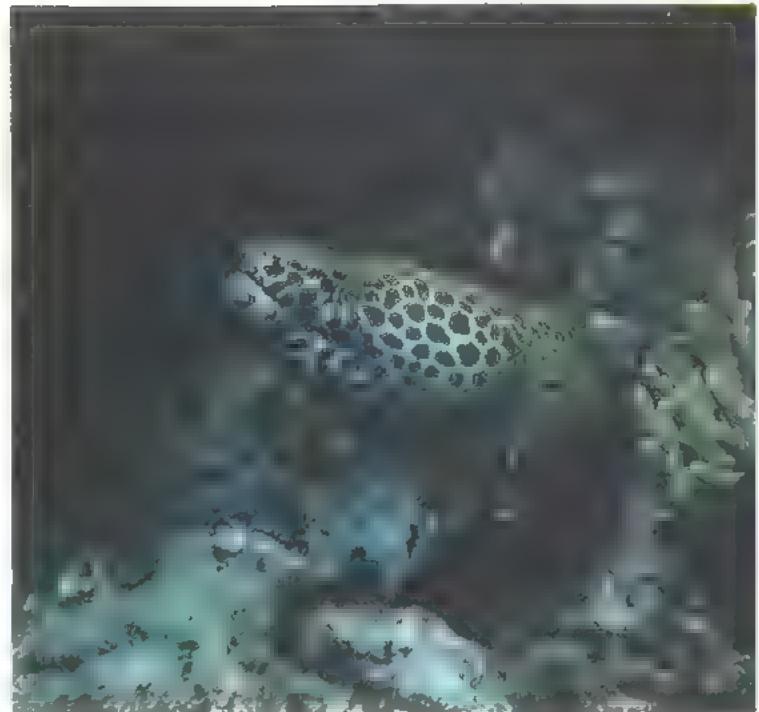
As for the diving itself, well, the word 'outstanding' is likely to spring to a diver's mind after a dive in Indonesia.

Scientists believe tropical marine life was born in these waters billions of years ago and spread out into the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This means there is a profusion of species here, some found nowhere else on the planet.

Sulawesi is often cited as the best of the best, but almost anywhere from Bali eastwards will have plenty to keep you happy. But don't rush into a dive expecting huge fish and wadges of pelagics though. Much of Indonesia's beauty lies in the smaller creatures. Invertebrates of all colours and species, many only found in particularly small areas feature heavily here, creating a haven for macro enthusiasts.

The Kungkungan Bay area is one such example. It is home to a host of strange and unfamiliar creatures that thrive in the special conditions the bay offers. If you are looking for more in the way of clear water, look at the south and east of Sulawesi, as the water generally contains less nutrients and the visibility is better. This area is also great for corals as reefs are densely populated, you only have to see Indonesia's dive advertising, with the local man in a dugout canoe paddling over pristine branching corals, to realise that.

Sulawesi itself often rates highly in dive guides, but so, too, do Lombok, Bali, Flores, Alor and Ambon. All these islands with the exception of Bali are almost unknown outside South East Asia and offer the diver a fantastic opportunity to visit one of the last untouched underwater wonders of the world.



# Malaysia

- 1 George Town
- 2 Kuala Lumpur
- 3 Kota Bharu
- 4 Mersing
- 5 P Dickson
- 6 Sarawak
- 7 Sabah
- 8 Kuching
- 9 Kota Kinabalu
- 10 Victoria



**How to get there** ➔ Several major airlines fly into Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital, but it is also easy to fly into Singapore and travel on by bus. Check out Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airlines Emirates Air, Malaysia Air and British Airways. If you want budget fares try Garuda Indonesia.

**Entry requirements** ➔ You will need a full passport with at least six months to run for a three month stay. If you are planning to visit the Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah on Borneo, you will have to pass through immigration on arrival in both Peninsular Malaysia and at your destination in Borneo.

**Climate** ➔ The whole of Malaysia is equatorial – ie hot and humid. Rain falls throughout the year, but there are two distinct rainy seasons when the heaviest rainfall is – March to May and September to November. Coastal areas are affected by monsoon winds, blowing a temperate from the south west and north east.

**Inoculations required** ➔ Hepatitis A, tetanus, typhoid, polio and anti-malarial tablets, although most resorts are bug free

**Language** ➔ Malay is the official language but English is widely spoken even in outlying areas.

**Currency** ➔ The Malaysian ringgit (or dollar). It is easy to exchange US dollars and sterling.

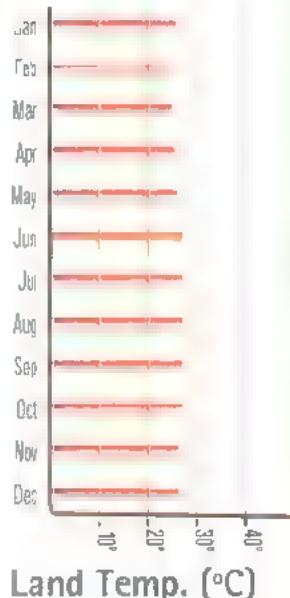


**Tourist Authority** ➔ Malaysian Tourist Development Corporation, 57 Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 5DH. Tel 0171 930 7932, fax 0171 930 9015

## The country

Malaysia is split into three territories. Peninsular Malaysia, which is connected to mainland South East Asia and Sarawak and Sabah, which are the major part of Borneo, along with the Sultanate of Brunei and the Indonesian state of Kalimantan.

The first thing that will strike you about Malaysia is its people. They are the friendliest in the world. The main religion is Islam, and the majority of the population are Malay, although





the smaller Chinese population has tended to control business.

Malaysia is one of the most westernised Asian countries and has a good tourist infrastructure. Tourism, the country's third largest industry and caters for all types of traveller from the holidaymaker to the budget-conscious backpacker and the more adventurous thrill-seeker. It is an incredibly beautiful country with tropical rainforests, high mountains and clear, clean waters on both sides.



Getting around Peninsular Malaysia is easy because the road system is good and there are fast and efficient bus and train services to take you virtually anywhere. Internal travel in Borneo is more difficult because the hinterland is mainly rainforest. Fast river boats are the most effective means of getting around here.

Getting to Borneo is easiest by air and flights can be taken from either Kuala Lumpur or Singapore.

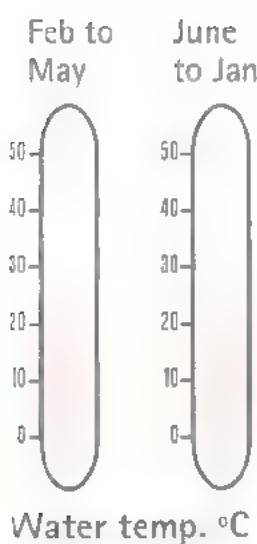
## The diving

Possibly the most important and exciting dive area in Malaysia is the small island of Sipadan. The island was first used for diving in the early 1980s and now there are several new resorts on this small island. It is now considered full and the Malaysian government has banned any more resorts here.

The reason for Sipadan's popularity is its extremely prolific marine life. Turtles abound here, as do many pelagic fish species including barracuda, jacks and sharks. Sipadan is, these days, on the mainstream dive travel route and the five resorts are regularly full with Europeans, Americans and Japanese.

Ironically, other areas, specifically around Peninsular Malaysia, have yet to be tapped as a diving resource. For a country so organised in most other ways this is quite refreshing. Only the islands of Pulau Island, Tioman and, to a lesser extent, Perhentian have been heard of outside Malaysia, perhaps because they are the only islands with any form of diving infrastructure.

But there is so much diving to be had here. Areas such as the Terengganu Marine Park, for example, can offer divers a fantastic time with a host of dive



# Malaysia



sites.

Malaysian beaches are a favourite nesting site for several turtle species, including the pretty leatherback and, at certain times of the year, large females can be seen along the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

Because of its rainforest environment, Borneo offers very little diving. The outlying islands such as Sipadan are slowly being discovered, but there is very little on mainland Borneo because of poor visibility.

There are several places you can dive, though, including Layang-Layang a 21 mile coral atoll 300 km off Sabah, Borneo. The atoll is home to one dive resort – the Layang Layang Island Resort – and dive conditions are excellent. Sabah itself has a marine park at a place called Tunku Abdul Rahman, which is located off its northwestern coastline. The area is only about five miles or so from the main town of Kota Kinabalu, and you can organise your diving from here.

Other dive sites off Sabah include the Pulau Tiga Park, Labuan Federal Territory – again to the north west – and the off shore islands of the Semporna Marine Park in the east.



# Philippines



- 1 *Luzon*
- 2 *Manila*
- 3 *Mindoro*
- 4 *Tablas*
- 5 *Masbate*
- 6 *Tacloban*
- 7 *Leyte*
- 8 *Bohol*
- 9 *Cebu*
- 10 *Negros*
- 11 *Panay*
- 12 *Palawan*
- 13 *Dinagat*
- 14 *Mindanao*
- 15 *Basilan*

**How to get there** ➔ Most of the world's leading airlines fly to Manila (Nino Aquino International Airport). From here you can either take another airline (normally PAL) to Cebu, or a smaller aircraft to one of the outlying islands. If you really want to go bush, then a boat is required.

**Entry requirements** ➔ You will need a current passport and an onward or return air ticket. For stays of less than 21 days you will be given a visa on arrival. For longer visits you will need a long term visa which is available from the Philippine Consulate in London.

**Climate** ➔ There are distinct seasons in the Philippines, although the country is warm and humid all year. The dry season, between November and March, is cooler than the rainy season from June to October. There are also two monsoon seasons. The first, from November to March brings strong north westerly winds. A gentler, more predictable monsoon from June to November blows from the Southwest.

**Inoculations required** ➔ Hepatitis A+B, typhoid, tetanus, polio and anti-malaria s.

**Language** ➔ Filipino and English

**Currency** ➔ Philippine peso

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Philippines Tourist Authority, 17 Albermarle Street, London W1X 7HA. Tel 0171 499 5443, fax 0171 499 5772.

## The country

The Philippines is an archipelago consisting of 7107 islands, some large, some small. They separate the Celebes Sea and the South China Sea from the Pacific Ocean and have had a varied history.

The archipelago is the second largest in the world, only beaten by Indonesia, but it is much more compact than Indonesia, which makes island hopping much easier.

The islands are divided into four groups – Luzon, the Visayas, Palawan and Mindanao. Within these four groups are the 14 regions that make up the Philippines. Luzon, the most northerly island and site of the capital city, Manila, is home to just over half the population and is the most industrialised island in the chain.

Of the other islands, only 2000 are inhabited and less than 500 of them are larger than a square mile. To give an idea of how remote and untouched

# Philippines

this country is, 2500 islands are not even named.

The islands have had a turbulent history and were controlled by other countries (mainly Spain and the USA) up until 1946, when independence was declared. But even then the turmoil didn't stop and the legacy of the Marcos dictatorship is taking some time to be forgotten, although the country has worked hard since 1992 to bring about political stability and economic recovery.

The Filipinos are a friendly, welcoming people and tend to be more westernised than others in this part of the world, thanks mainly to the American influence.

The islands are home to over 100 ethnic groups, although the majority of Filipinos are of Malay origin. The Philippines is the only Christian state in Asia.

## The diving

Once considered to be one of the most outstanding dive destinations in the world, the Philippines has suffered through bad environmental and fishing practices.



Cyanide, dynamite and coral mining have taken their toll on many of the marvellous coral reefs the area had, and some areas have been totally destroyed. But current thinking about Philippines diving is outdated. No longer is the nation's diving industry struggling with old equipment, poorly trained divemasters and boats that look more like wrecks than the famous wrecks of Coron Island. These days the industry is slick, well run, enthusiastic and very conservation conscious.

Staff are highly experienced and well informed – in fact everything you would expect from a progressive industry.

The wealth of islands here means there really is no shortage of diving areas. And the diversity of the diving is also appealing to divers who can experience many types of diving all within a fairly small area.

Coron Island, for example, offers a good selection of shallow classic reef dives, but it also has underwater caverns, several outstanding WWII shipwrecks and even freshwater

# Philippines

lakes.

Divers looking for real Philippines adventure should try a liveaboard out to the Sulu Sea. The diving here is generally considered to be as exciting as it gets and includes walls, blue water and off-shore reefs. Expect to see large pelagics, huge coral and sponge formations and many species of sharks and ray.

The Tubbataha Reefs in the Sulu Sea were awarded World Heritage Site status – another nail in the coffin of the down-beaten reputation the Philippines had. The area is the largest coral atoll in the Sulu Sea and home to over 400 species of corals and 2000 species of fish and, consequently, well worth a visit.

For more of a holiday feel check out Puerto Galera, which offers great diving and good night-life afterwards. The dives here range from easy coral gardens to pretty walls and exciting drift dives. There are also plenty of operators and excellent accommodation possibilities.

Similar to Galera, Boracay is another top Philippines holiday destination and one that also offers good diving as well. Again, the area offers everything from coral gardens to drift and walls dives where big pelagics are the norm.

Cebu and surrounding areas are also good for diving and also has several expensive resort areas as well as an international airport.

Choose carefully where you dive in the Philippines and you will find some good diving. Some areas have been destroyed and some could even be beyond any natural regeneration, according to scientists.

But, thankfully, there are many areas that still offer the true spirit of adventure and show divers at least some of the beauty that the Philippines were once famed for.



# Thailand

- (S. Thailand)
- 1 Bangkok
  - 2 Kho Khot Kra
  - 3 Ko Samui
  - 4 Chanthaburi
  - 5 Chon Buri
  - 6 Ban Kantang
  - 7 Phuket
  - 8 Surat Thani
  - 9 Singara
  - 10 Gulf of Thailand



**How to get there** ➤ There are plenty of international flights from London to Bangkok. You can get there cheaply with Aeroflot, and Garuda Indonesia. Or in a little more comfort with Thai Airways, British Airways and Cathay Pacific.

**Entry requirements** ➤ For stays of less than 15 days no visa is required. Over that, there are various types of visa available. Contact the Thailand Embassy for details.

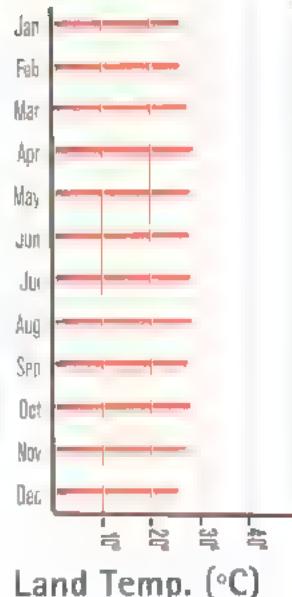
**Climate** ➤ Thailand is renowned for being hot and humid and Bangkok can turn into something akin to a sauna, but towards the coast humidity is less intense. The climate is hot and sultry from March to May when it rains during the afternoon and evenings from May to October and is dry and cool from Nov to March. The coastal regions experience two monsoons – a north easterly and a south westerly.

**Inoculations required** ➤ Hepatitis A + B, polio, typhoid and tetanus and anti-malarials.

**Language** ➤ Thai, although English is widely spoken.

**Currency** ➤ The baht, which is linked to the US\$

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Thailand Tourist Authority 49 Abermarle Street, London W1X 3FE. Tel 0171 499 7679, fax 0171 629 5519.



## The country

The land is often referred to as the land of smiles and it is easy to see why when you meet its people.

Your first encounter with Thailand will be Bangkok, which isn't to everyone's taste. It is a bustling city full of noise and traffic pollution, but that is just the surface. Anyone visiting this country should aim to spend several days in Bangkok visiting the temples, riding down the river and just hanging out.

Where else could you find old wooden silted houses nestling among glass and metal skyscrapers – the place is amazing. But watch out for scam artists trying to sell fake goods and gems. All fake goods can be seized at customs on your return and gems (if real) are subject to duty.

Etiquette is very important in Thailand and there are a number of customs and traditions that visitors should respect such as removing shoes before entering a building and not commenting on peoples' feet.

Outside the capital, the country really blossoms. The scenery is breathtaking and the people are warm and welcoming. Getting around is easy as Thailand has an efficient transport system including buses, trains and ferries.

Most of the diving takes place down the leg of Thailand, but if you have some time to spend in the country try a forest trek up in the northern reaches.

The southern part of the country is a combination of beautiful sandy beaches, lush forests and dramatic limestone cliffs and mountains.

There are several popular beach resorts in this part of Thailand, some of which are better than others. Pattaya, for example, has a rather seedy reputation these days and quite honestly doesn't have the best diving.

Phuket on the other hand is a gateway to some outstanding sites and is the staging post for trips to the outer islands and Burma Banks.

Other islands worth a visit either for diving or just sight-seeing include Koh Phangan, Koh Samui, Koh Phi Phi and Krabi.



# Thailand

## The diving

Thailand's diving is surprisingly weather-dependent, but don't worry because when one side of the country is experiencing bad weather, the other side is at its best. From October through to May, the west side facing the Andaman Sea has the best diving weather while the Gulf of Thailand on the east is being battered by the north east monsoon. Conversely, the Gulf side is calm and pleasant from May to October.

There are plenty of dive operators and plenty of dive sites for the visiting diver. Plan your visit well and you will not be disappointed. The eastern side which is lapped by the Gulf of Thailand does not possess the same number of outstanding dive sites as the west, but that's because it lacks the likes of the Burma Banks, Similan Islands and the Andaman Islands. Koh Samui is one of the better areas here, but you also have Ang Thong Marine Park off Koh Phangan and some pretty sites near Pattaya.

The western side wins the best diving battle simply because of the number of sites although some, like the Andaman Islands and Similan, are way out to sea and only really accessible by liveaboard. Here you can see leopard sharks, whale sharks, manta rays and a profusion of fish life.

The Burma Banks are not islands, but a series of shallow banks and are, therefore, only diveable in the best weather. They are not really part of Thailand at all, because they belong to Myanmar (formerly Burma). Dive boats have to obtain permission to dive here.

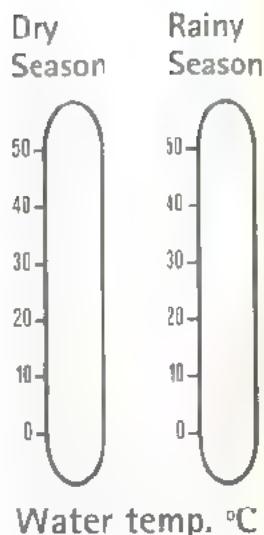
Although the reefs are pleasant they are not outstanding, but most divers don't really care because they are too busy watching what comes out of the blue - sharks, mantas the lot.

The Andaman Islands form an archipelago of nine islands. The area is a marine park and has a number of excellent dive sites. They are in fact a part of India, but are closer to Thailand, being a little less than 300 miles away from Phuket.

There are some 500 islands in the chain and about 25 are inhabited. Being so remote they offer arguably the best diving in Thailand. Everything is here from fantastic reefs to large pelagics.

But don't pass up the chance to dive the sites nearer to land on this side of the coast. There are several national parks off Koh Phi Phi, Krabi and Koh Lanta each with outstanding marine life and amazing reef topography.

There are a number of good dive operators around all the main diving areas so finding one isn't a problem. Most operate under the PADI or NAUI systems and even one BSAC school.



Water temp. °C



- |    |                 |    |                  |
|----|-----------------|----|------------------|
| 1  | Hanoi           | 12 | Ho Chi Minh City |
| 2  | Haiphong        | 13 | Rach Gia         |
| 3  | Tonkin          |    |                  |
| 4  | Red River Delta |    |                  |
| 5  | Thanh Hoa       |    |                  |
| 6  | Vinh            |    |                  |
| 7  | Da Nang         |    |                  |
| 8  | Qui Nhon        |    |                  |
| 9  | Nha Trang       |    |                  |
| 10 | Soc Trang       |    |                  |
| 11 | Phan Thiet      |    |                  |
- Inland border

**How to get there** ► Plenty of airlines fly to Vietnam, but not directly from Britain. You have to change planes somewhere along the way. Check out Aeroflot, Air France, KLM, Qantas, Emirates, Thai Airways and Cathay Pacific.

**Entry requirements** ► You'll need a visa and these can be time-consuming and costly to obtain. Regulations change so check with the Embassy.

**Climate** ► Vietnam experiences a number of climates because of its geography. The high sections of country are considered temperate and can be cold at times, whereas the lowlands around the Mekong Delta are tropical and generally hot and humid. There are two main monsoon seasons affecting various parts of the country. The north east monsoon between October to March sends chilly winds through the north, but keeps the south dry and warm. The south western monsoon in April and May brings warm humid weather to the south with bursts of heavy rain.

**Inoculations required** ► Hepatitis A + B, polio, typhoid and tetanus and anti malaria drugs.

**Language** ► Vietnamese is the official language, which is almost as hard to learn as Thai. English and French are spoken in resorts.

**Currency** ► New dong is the legal tender, but many hotels and resorts want all payment in US\$.

**Tourist Authority** ► 12-14 Victoria Road, Kensington, London W8 5RD  
Tel 0171 937 1912, fax 0171 937 6108.

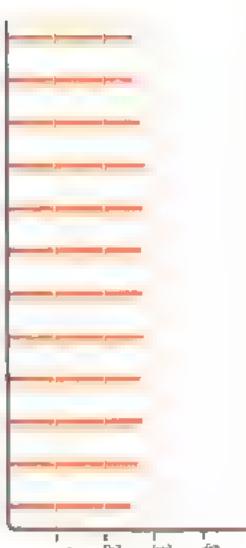
## The country

Vietnam would have remained an isolated South East Asian backwater if it wasn't for a little scuffle between the communist north and the capitalist south. America stepped in and the rest, as they say, is history.

After years of being shut off to all but Eastern European tourists and western backpackers, Vietnam is opening up, with the stated aim of attracting three million tourists a year by the turn of the century.

Because of its isolation, most of us only have a Hollywood image of Vietnam, but the country has much more to offer than paddy fields and dense jungle.

The first western tourists were Americans who came to reive the past but



Land Temp. (°C)



as time goes on more and more money is being poured into resort complexes and hotels to support the demand for bed space.

The real Vietnam though, is a mix of spectacular scenery, rich culture and friendly people. The country itself stretches about 1600km down the South China Sea and steals the lion's share of coastline from its neighbours Laos and Cambodia. In total Vietnam has a staggering 3541km of coastline, but it also has two very large and very muddy river deltas, the Red River in the north and the Mekong in the south.

The countryside here is absolutely beautiful and full of character, yet Vietnam hides its secrets well. In fact a species of deer was only discovered by science in 1994 – how much more is out there? Its diving too is only just being opened up and much is still waiting to be discovered.

The tourist industry is centred towards the south of the country, simply because of the more favourable conditions found here. Resorts are springing up all the time and have the advantage of being new and well funded.

## The diving

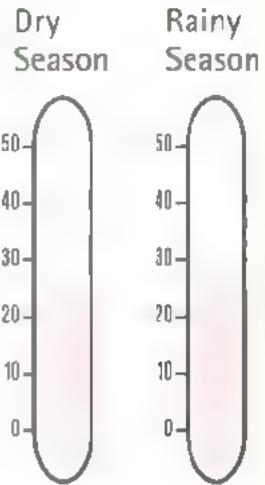
There are a few dive centres, several built within new resort complexes, which is a definite advantage in a country where tourism and diving are both new, but you have to watch where you go because the muddy Mekong Delta really puts a downer on the visibility in a number of places.

Nha Trang is considered the best area for diving. Here you will find Khanh Hoa province, which has about 700 or so offshore islands and the advantage of being sheltered from the Mekong run-off.

Information on the diving in Vietnam is still limited and areas are known to have been ruined by heavy dynamite fishing. Much of the coast is off limits and so many of the numerous wrecks are also off limits. This situation doesn't make for brilliant diving at the moment, and nor does the questionable fishing practices.

There is a huge amount awaiting discovery in Vietnamese waters, whether your interest lies in ecology or wrecks, but not just yet.

On a positive note, the Vietnamese government is looking to create 87 national parks, some of which will be marine in nature. This should help to preserve the delicate and beautiful natural resource the country has.



Water temp. °C

## Dive Centres

**Dive As a**  
**121/10 Mu 4 Patak Road,**  
**Kata Beach, PO Box 70,**  
**Phuket 83100, Thailand**  
**Tel. 0066 76 330598 or**  
**284117**  
**Fax: 0066 76 284033**  
**E-mail:**  
**info@diveas.a.com**  
**Internet.**  
**www.diveas.a.com**  
**PADI**  
**PADI 5 star CDC centre**  
**offering liveaboard cruises,**  
**whale shark safaris, day**  
**trips, PADI courses and**  
**IDC/CDC programmes**

**La Laguna Beach Club &**  
**Dive Centre**  
**Big La Laguna Beach,**  
**Puerto Galera Oriental**  
**Mindoro, Philippines**  
**Tel: 0063 973 878 409**  
**Fax: 0063 973 855 545**  
**PADI Trips and training**  
**organised for groups and**  
**individuals.**

**Niugini Diving plc**  
**PO Box 320**  
**Lae, Papua New Guinea**  
**Tel: 00675 472 5692**  
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**E-mail.**  
**niuginidive@globalnet.pg**  
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**adventure diving &**  
**discovery trips. Tailored to**  
**suit individuals or groups**  
**of 6.**

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**1st Floor, No 484, Block P,**  
**Bandar Seri Bintangor,**  
**PO Box 61120**  
**91021 Tawau,**  
**Sabah, Malaysia**  
**Tel: 0060 89 765 200**  
**Fax: 0060 89 763 575**  
**/0060 89 763 563**  
**E-mail: psrt@po.jaring.my**  
**PADI. Diving at Sipadan**  
**Island, Kapalai Island,**

**Lankayan Island For**  
**Orangutan stay at Sep'ok**  
**Palm Resort.**



**Seaventures Tours &**  
**Travel SDN. BHD.**  
**4th Floor, Room 422-424,**  
**Wisma Sabah, 88300 Kota**  
**Kinabalu,**  
**Sabah, Malaysia**  
**Tel: 0060 88**  
**251669/261669**  
**Fax: 0060 88 251667**  
**E-mail:**  
**seavent@po.jaring.my**  
**Website:**  
**http://www.borneo-**  
**online.com.my/sv/**  
**PADI**  
**Seaventures resort is a**  
**customised accommodation**  
**platform off Mabul Island**  
**Sabah, Malaysia, 20 minutes by**  
**boat from amazing Sipadan.**

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**Fax: 0066 76 293 122**  
**PADI Liveaboard**  
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Indian Ocean



Sri Lanka



Maldives



Seychelles



Comoros



Madagascar



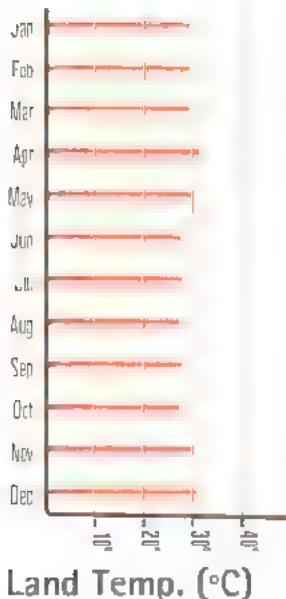
Mauritius

# Comoros

1  
2 

4  
5  
6  
3  
7  
8

- 1 *Njazidja*
- 2 *Moran*
- 3 *Mwali*
- 4 *Nzwani*
- 5 *Mutsamudu*
- 6 *Fomboni*
- 7 *Mayotte*
- 8 *Dzaoudzi*



**How to get there** ➔ There are two flights per week from Dubai to Moroni with Emirates Air. Alternatively Air France has a weekly flight from Paris.

**Entry requirements** ➔ A visa is issued on arrival.

**Climate** ➔ The Comoros are tropical – hot and humid on the coasts and cooler on the higher land

The rainy season runs from October through to May, with the heaviest rain seen from December to May. The dry season from May through September is dominated by cool southerly winds which knock the temperature down. Cyclones are possible at this time of year though.

**Inoculations required** ➔ Hepatitis A + B, typhoid, tetanus, polio, rabies and anti malaria tablets.

**Language** ➔ French, Arabic, some Swahili and English

**Currency** ➔ The Comoran franc

**Tourist Authority** ➔ None



# Comoros



## The country

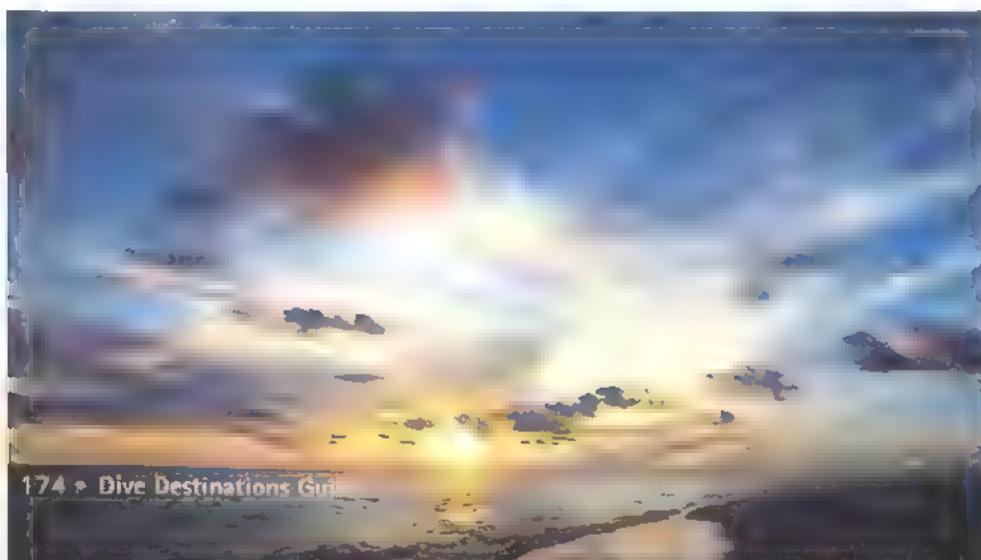
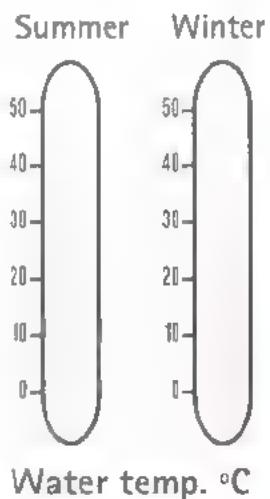
Comoros is an archipelago of four islands and a bunch of islets sitting in the Indian Ocean about 10–12 degrees south of the Equator. They are less than 200 miles off the East African coast and just to the north west of Madagascar at the top end of the Mozambique channel.

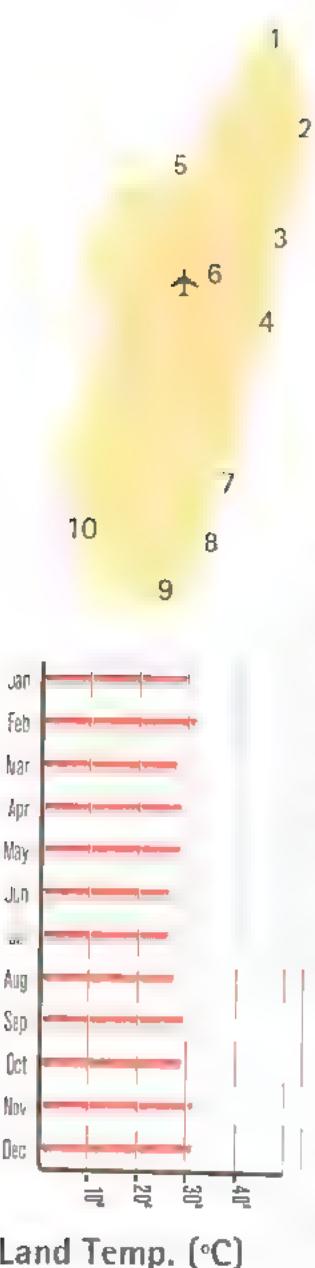
The four main islands are Mayotte, Nzwani, Njazidja and Mwali. Njazidji is the largest island and is often referred to as Grande Comore. The capital, Moroni, is located here.

## The diving

The diving is typical of most Indian Ocean diving. The coral forms classical reefs and impressive walls. Before tourism reached the islands, fishing was one of the main ways of making a living here and that shows in the diving. There are no concentrations of big pelagics or hunting experiences, but what the Comoros lack in excitement, they make up for in relaxation and beauty. The reefs are pretty, the reef fish are plentiful and the diving is easy. There is one wreck, a small cargo boat, which led an interesting life before it was sunk as an artificial reef. It now sits in 24m.

Every so often around the Comoros the fishermen catch a Coelacanth, a prehistoric fish that lives in the deep ocean. When one specimen was caught alive a couple of years ago the local dive centre bought and released the animal – now that must have been an amazing sight to watch.





**How to get there** ➤ Both Air Madagascar and Air France fly from Paris.

**Entry requirements** ➤ A visa is required. Allow plenty of time for your application to be processed.

**Climate** ➤ Madagascar experiences various weather patterns. The high inland plateau has a temperate climate and gets cold in winter. The east coast is wet and is dominated by two rainy seasons which the locals call the rainy season and the season when it rains! The west coast is pretty dry and arid.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None is required, although anti-malaria tablets are advised.

**Language** ➤ Malagasy and French

**Currency** ➤ The Malagasy franc

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Madagascar Consulate, 16 Lanark Mansions, Pennard Road, London W12 8DT. Tel 0181 746 0133, fax 0181 746 0134.

## The country

Madagascar is the world's fourth largest island, and was once a part of the African continent. Several thousand years on, it lies off the coast running up from South Africa past Mozambique. It covers a staggering 592,000 square kilometres and the hinterland is dominated by a high mountainous plateau that keeps temperatures down. The capital Antananarivo is located in the Ankaratra mountain range.

Most visitors to Madagascar come to see the wildlife. The island is renowned for both its rare and beautiful species. An amazing 80 per cent of its animal and plant species are unique to the island, including the ring-tailed lemur and many many birds. The overall biodiversity of Madagascar is outstanding, and naturalists, biologists, wildlife photographers and enthusiasts flock here from all over the world.

## The diving

Very little is known about the diving on Madagascar. The island is fringed with mangrove stands and has several rivers flowing out which reduces visibility. However, the nation does have some coral reefs and the channel between it and Mozambique is frequented by large pelagics.

Diving seems, at the moment, to have taken a back seat to other kinds of eco-tourism, but that should soon change.



# Maldives

- |                            |                            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 <i>Huwarafushi Atoll</i> | 12 <i>Felidhu Atoll</i>    |
| 2 <i>Haaalif Atoll</i>     | 13 <i>Meemu Atoll</i>      |
| 3 <i>Shaviyani Atoll</i>   | 14 <i>Thaa Atoll</i>       |
| 4 <i>Noonu Atoll</i>       | 15 <i>Laamu Atoll</i>      |
| 5 <i>Lhaviyani Atoll</i>   | 16 <i>Gaaf Alifu Atoll</i> |
| 6 <i>Raa Atoll</i>         | 17 <i>Seenu Atoll</i>      |
| 7 <i>Baa Atoll</i>         |                            |
| 8 <i>North-Male Atoll</i>  |                            |
| 9 <i>South-Male Atoll</i>  |                            |
| 10 <i>Ari Atoll</i>        |                            |
| 11 <i>Faaf Atoll</i>       |                            |

**How to get there** ➤ There are a few ways to get to the Maldives, although not as many as you would think. Britannia flies a non-stop charter flight for many companies and Emirates flies a scheduled route which is routed via Dubai.

**Entry requirements** ➤ A full passport is all that is required.

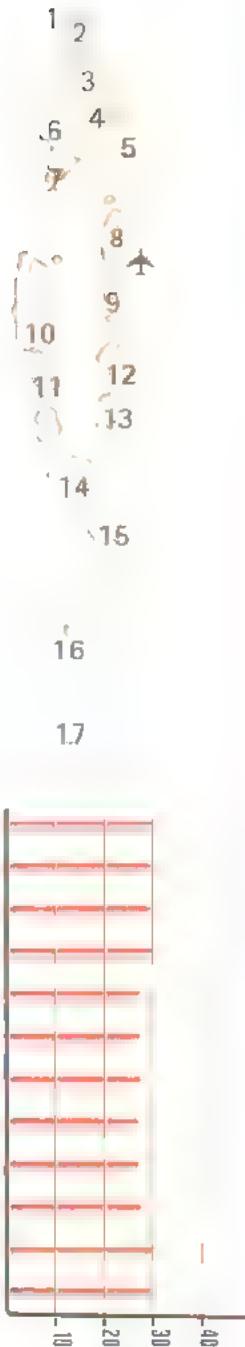
**Climate** ➤ The climate is dictated by two monsoon seasons – the north west monsoon runs from November to April and gives dry weather. Conversely the south east monsoon brings rain from May to October.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None on resorts.

**Language** ➤ Divehi is the local dialect, but English is widely understood in resorts.

**Currency** ➤ The local currency is the Rufia, although the only real currency for western visitors is the US dollar.

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Maldives High Commission, 22 Nottingham Place, London W1M 3FB. Tel 0171 224 2135



Land Temp. (°C)





## The country

The Maldives are tiny blips of paradise in the perpetual blue of the Indian Ocean. They are world famous as a dive destination and are fast becoming a hot spot for westerners searching for that Robinson Crusoe experience as well.

There are over 1000 islands, about 300 miles south west off the tip of India. The atolls are basically what's left of numerous volcanoes which have sunk beneath the sea. The islands are what is left of the craters that stick above the water-line – but not much as the highest part of the nation is about 1.8 metres above sea level. The Maldives are, therefore, under threat of sea level rise thanks to global warming.

The nation has a very slick tourist industry, which basically keeps the westerners away from the nationals. The westerners are kept on a series of resort islands or on liveaboards and only meet locals who are staff, or on several sanctioned tourist islands. These give an indication of real life in the Maldives, but you also have numerous trinket shops to visit.

Liveaboard diving in the Maldives has always been popular and today several companies offer this service. Boats visit several of the atolls sometimes on one trip and give guests a better chance to visit this island nation than just on one island.

Resorts though, offer dry land, protection from the elements, a safe environment and an idyllic setting. Additionally None of the developments are allowed to build over the tree line and so each island keeps its developed in-paradise look.

## The diving

The world famous islands and their surrounding water need no introduction as far as divers are concerned. They are one of the few places in the world where sightings of manta rays and whale sharks are common. Encounters can't be guaranteed, but at certain times of the year in various places they are a good bet. Ari Atoll and the north Malé atoll are two of the best places, but all the Maldives are excellent for diving.

A very tough commercial fishing policy only allows fishermen to take catches with lines and hooks gives the islands a diverse and abundant supply



of marine creatures. Nets do not drag the coral and the hooks and lines do not remove unwanted species.

Another common sighting are sharks. Various sites such as Maya T'la are excellent places to see grey reef and white tip reef sharks. But they aren't the only species here as in the current-washed outer reefs you can see anything from a bull shark to a hammerhead or even a tiger.

The currents, which can be very strong on some sites, entice all sorts of creatures. They tend to be strongest on the outer walls of the atolls, but can be found anywhere. The current feeds the ecosystem and provides the lower end of the food chain with plenty of nutrients to thrive. However, the current is also good for the larger forms of life. The best time to see mantas and whale sharks is when the current is running and laden with plankton.

However, the creatures are then at the surface and snorkelling is probably the order of the day. Scuba gear is cumbersome and will hold you back if you are trying to stay in pace with a whale shark swimming head on into the rushing water. At certain sites around the nation you can find manta ray cleaning stations, which allow you to study them close up while on scuba. It takes some time to get close, but if you stay on the bottom and remain calm the rays will eventually come very close indeed. However, swim around and make frantic movements and the rays are frightened off.

In 1997 divers frightened the rays on one reef off the top and down to around 20m. Before, they cleaned on the top of the reef in about 8m, giving divers plenty of time to watch the creatures. Sadly, the rays retired to 20m



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when too many divers upset them. This gave limited time for divers and spoilt the experience. Thankfully, some of the rays are returning to the shallows and if divers behave themselves, the situation should improve.

#### Wreck-wise

The Maldives are better than many expect. There are a few classic wrecks ie ships that have hit something and sunk, and several artificial ones sunk deliberately by dive resorts. None have any decent historical story to tell, but they make excellent dives. Most wrecks have shoals of fish, plenty of static life and are always within diveable limits.

One wreck, an artificial one as it goes, is the home to a large shoal of jacks and a tame stingray. The ray is best seen in the morning, but the jacks are around all the time. The current is never too bad and it makes the whole experience outstanding.

Night dives are not too dissimilar to many other tropical coral reef locations. There are nudibranchs, free swimming morays, lionfish and soldierfish all over the place. But there is one dive here that surpasses all

that. It's on Maya Tilla, the shark dive (Tilla is the Maldivian name given to a reef in a channel or off a main reef). At night the grey reef sharks are replaced by feeding white-tip reef sharks. These cute-looking sharks hunt for fusiliers over the reef alongside several morays. Also found here at night are a large hawksbill turtle, rabbitfish and grouper.

The Maldives are a wonderful dive destination. They offer all sorts of experiences from classic pretty reefs to mind-blowing animals. Anyone visiting these islands in for a huge treat.



## THE MALDIVES



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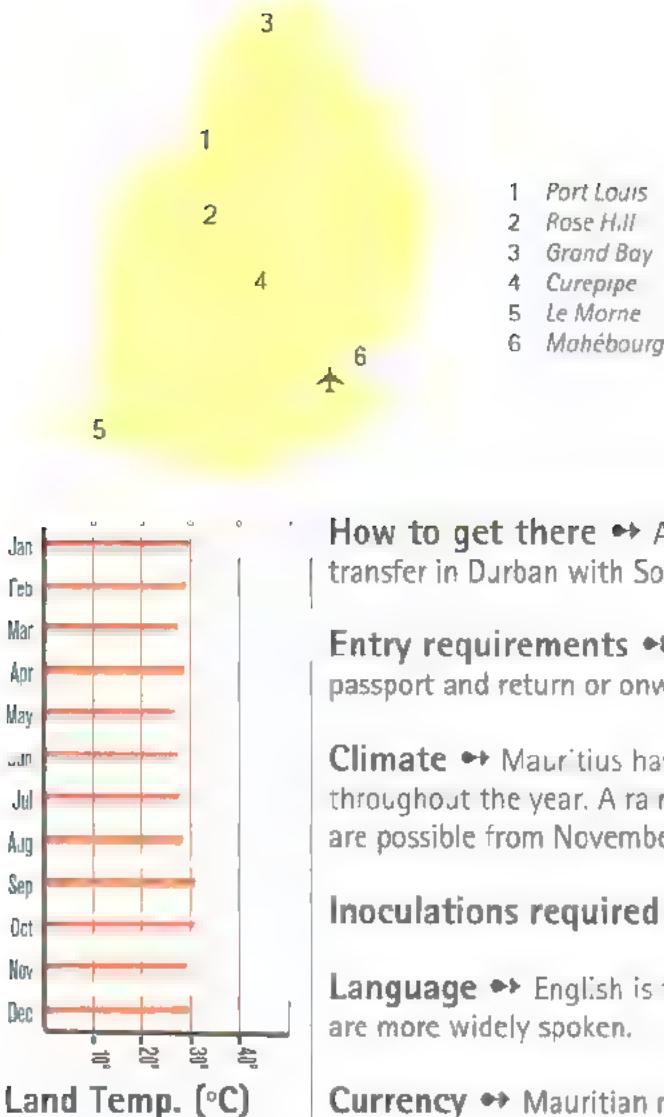
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**How to get there** ➤ Air Mauritius has flights from Belgium or you can transfer in Durban with South Africa Airlines.

**Entry requirements** ➤ For stays of up to one month you need only a full passport and return or onward ticket.

**Climate** ➤ Mauritius has a sub-tropical climate, but temperatures do vary throughout the year. A rainy season runs from January to March and cyclones are possible from November to February.

**Inoculations required** ➤ None and there is no risk of malaria here.

**Language** ➤ English is the official language although French and Creole are more widely spoken.

**Currency** ➤ Mauritian rupee

**Tourist Authority** ➤ Mauritius Tourist Board, 32 Elvaston Place, London SW7 5 NW. Tel 0171 584 3666, fax 0171 225 1135.

## The country

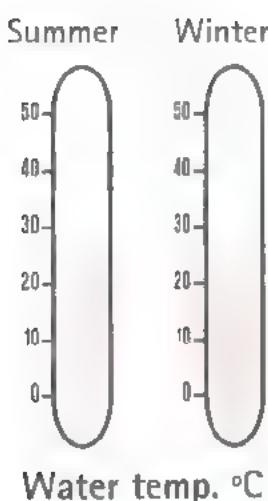
Mauritius lies in the Indian Ocean just north of the Tropic of Capricorn and to the east of Madagascar. It is volcanic in origin and was the home of the dodo, the flightless bird that has become the symbol of extinction.

The island has a spectacular natural beauty both on land and underwater. It has breathtaking waterfalls, freshwater lakes, a National Park, mountains and a stunning array of wildlife.

Tourist resorts are usually tucked into the surrounding scenery and so don't spoil the island's beauty.

## The diving

Mauritius is just as beautiful underwater. There are several resort islands offshore and several resorts on the main island itself. The fringing reef systems have a number of sites; some suitable for beginners and others for the more experienced. The calm waters within the barrier reef are shallow and provide novices with some excellent diving among the small reefs and bommies. For the more adventurous, there are several channels through the reef to the ocean and the outer reef is wall diving at its best. The fish life is good with sharks, dolphins, mantas and the occasional whale shark to find. For a true shark dive, operators take experienced divers to a site known as The Supermarket.



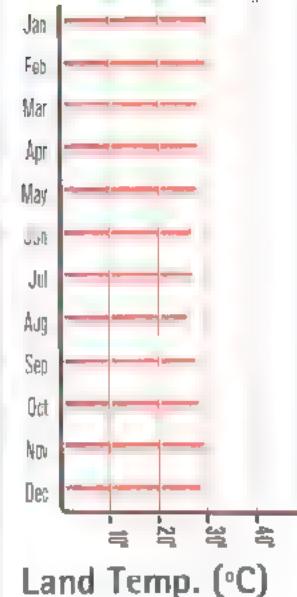
1

- 1 Silhouette
- 2 Victoria
- 3 Mahé Island
- 4 Praslin
- 5 Curieuse

2



3



**How to get there** ➔ There are several flights per week to the international airport on the main island of Mahé. Carriers include Air Seychelles, British Airways and Air France.

**Entry requirements** ➔ For stays of up to one month you need only a full passport and return or onward ticket.

**Climate** ➔ The Seychelles are within the tropics and, thankfully, outside the cyclone belt, although the climate is governed by two monsoon seasons. The south east monsoon brings warm dry weather from May to October and the north east monsoon from November to April brings cooler, wetter weather. The worst rains are in December and January.

**Inoculations required** ➔ None and there is no risk of malaria here

**Language** ➔ Creole, English and French

**Currency** ➔ Seychelles rupee

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Seychelles Tourist Authority, 2nd Floor Eros House, 111 Baker Street, London W1M 1FE. Tel 0171 224 1670, fax 0171 486 1352.

## The country

The Seychelles is a collection of some 115 islands of which about 80 or so are inhabited – the others are not much more than sandy protrusions from the Indian Ocean. The nation spreads over a massive 600,000 square kilometres, although the land mass is only just under 300 square miles.

As you can imagine there is a lot of sea between the islands and travelling between them requires either a plane ride or a long trip by boat.

There are four island groups within the Seychelles – the Mahé group, the Amirante group, the Farquhar group and the Aldabra group – which stretch south west towards Tanzania. Most are atolls, but the main islands are granite based and were left behind when the African continent migrated away from the Asian continent many millions of years ago. Mahé, Praslin, Silhouette and La Digue are the largest in the main group and are where the majority of the inhabitants live. They are also the centre of the tourism industry.

Tourism is the top money spinner in the island nation's economy, but resorts tend to be built to blend in with the stunning scenery these granite islands offer. Many of these islands have no coral reefs to protect them and so, at certain times of the year, they are exposed to the fury of the Indian Ocean.

The real draw for visitors here is the natural beauty of the place. The

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# Seychelles

Seychelles and the Galapagos are the only two island groups on the planet to support giant land tortoises. And, like the Galapagos on the other side of the world, its oceanic isolation has given the Seychelles a number of unique species.

The capital of the Seychelles is Victoria, on the island of Mahé. Here you will find a bustling town that is the central part of the nation. From here most visitors fan out to the chosen destination, which is usually either a hotel, resort or liveaboard dive boat. Scuba diving is one of the mainstays of the tourist industry and divers are made most welcome. But there are other things to do on holiday here. Almost half of the landmass of the islands is national park or nature reserve and visitors are welcome in all but the most environmentally sensitive of them.

## The diving

With such a diversity of life above the water it is little wonder that the life underwater is just as profuse. The Seychelles hosts an underwater photographic competition every year, which a number of the world's best underwater photographers attend, producing some stunning images. It just so happens that the competition is held during November when whale sharks come in to feed on the plankton blooms.

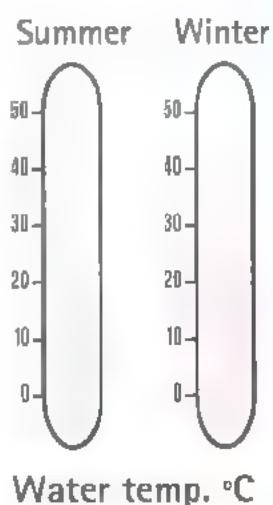
But these beautiful and graceful creatures aren't the only draw. The fish life is incredible, the corals are beautiful and the underwater topography is stunning. The granite islands perhaps have the pick of the underwater scenery with pinnacles, boulders and overhangs aplenty, but the atoll islands can still rustle up excellent walls and reef formations. The marine life to be seen is all pretty familiar to Indian Ocean divers, but in places it's so tightly packed into small areas that divers often don't know where to look first. L'îlot Bay is such a place. Within and around the boulder formations divers find an incredible diversity of life. It is often best to dive here when the current is strong as schools of jacks and other impressive creatures come in to feed.

To supplement the natural underwater scenery, the Seychelles also have several wreck sites. The rocky underwater formations were responsible for many of the sinkings, ensuring that many of the good wrecks are within safe diving limits.

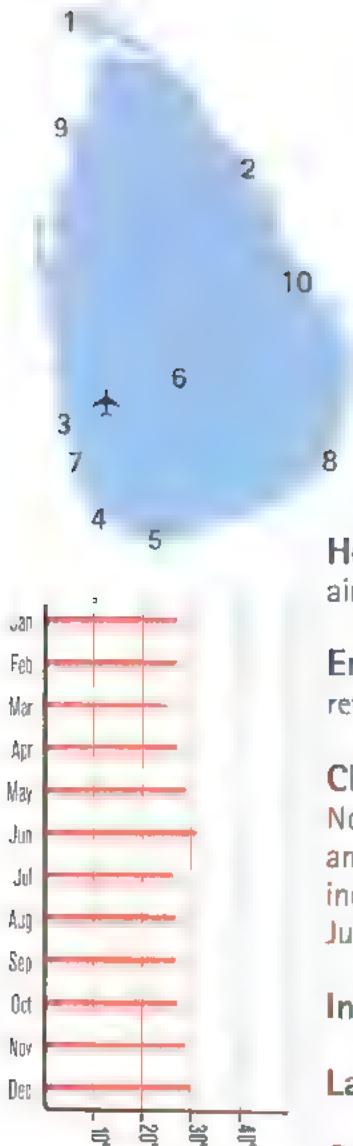
The atoll groups also offer some outstanding diving and some excellent resorts to boot. In the Amirantes chain, for example, there are several sites where huge pinnacles of coral rise up many hundreds of metres from the sea bed to about 25m from the surface. They are usually hit by currents and so are only suitable for advanced divers, but they play host to a profusion of marine life from turtles to sharks and seafans to massive coral formations.

The Seychelles' coral atolls are really at the frontier of diving today. They represent some of the most remote islands in the world to reach and dive and so offer the visitor some of the most pristine reef systems on the planet.

The Aldabra group is perhaps the most remote, being nearer to Tanzania than it is to Mahe, and was brought to the world's attention by Cousteau on one of his first voyages aboard the Calypso. The group is mainly atoll islands, although Assumption Island is a true limestone-based formation and the Aldabra Atoll is volcanic in origin. All have the Robinson Crusoe look and are surrounded by marvellous coral reefs.



Water temp. °C



- 1 Jaffna
- 2 Trincomalee
- 3 Colombo
- 4 Galle
- 5 Dondra Head
- 6 Kandy
- 7 Maratuwa
- 8 Pottuvil
- 9 Marmar!
- 10 Batticaloa

**How to get there** ➔ Colombo Airport is a refuelling stop for a number of airlines, including Emirates Air and Air Lanka.

**Entry requirements** ➔ For stays of less than 30 days only a passport and return air ticket are required.

**Climate** ➔ Generally hot, but there are better seasons than others.

November to March (the winter season) offers calm conditions in the south and west, although rain is possible and often welcome. March to April is incredibly hot. There are two monsoon seasons the south west during May to July and the north east from November to January.

**Inoculations required** ➔ Hepatitis A + B, typhoid, tetanus, polio, rabies

**Language** ➔ Sinhala, Tamil and English

**Currency** ➔ Sri Lanka rupee

**Tourist Authority** ➔ Sri Lanka Tourist Office & High Commission, 13 Hyde Park Gardens, London W2 2LU. Tel 0171 262 5009, fax 0171 262 7970.



# Sri Lanka



## The country

Sri Lanka is a large island – 277 miles long and 140 miles wide – off the south eastern coast of India. The international airport is 20 miles outside Colombo. The island is the home of cashew nuts, tea, spices, the world's only elephant orphanage and Arthur C Clarke, 2001 author and inventor of the communication satellite.

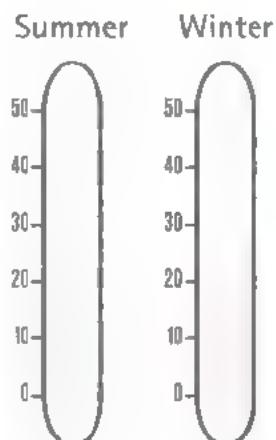
Sri Lanka was a major trading centre for spices, but like many ancient trading posts it has slipped into poverty in more recent times.

One reason for this is its reputation as being the Northern Ireland of the East. There are troubles here and random acts of terrorism by Tamil Tigers do occasionally (about once or twice a year) affect or even kill tourists. This situation doesn't look as if it is going to change anytime soon. However, the trouble is usually centred on the capital Colombo. The northern region and east coast are considered dangerous and off-limits, but bear that in mind and stay out of Colombo and you'll find a friendly people and a lushly vegetated tropical island.



## The diving

The best diving in Sri Lanka is on the west coast. Here you will find a number of reef systems including Hikkaduwa, Arippu and Silavaturai. The better diving is well off shore, as the water immediately around the island is quite turbid. Hikkaduwa offers something for beginners and experienced divers in one area. There are teeming reefs here and several wrecks to keep divers interested. Some areas are good only in calm weather – the area from Dondra to Tangalle, for example. A trip to the outer islands and reefs on a liveaboard is recommended as a chance to dive pristine and little visited sites.



Water temp. °C

## Dive Centres

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Fax: 00248 344223  
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## Tour Operators

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– 0181 222 7840

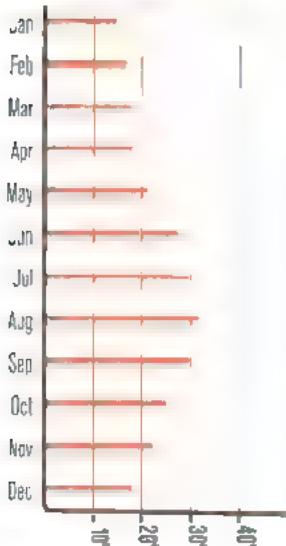
**Maldives Scuba Tours**  
– 01449 780220

**Sport Abroad**  
– 01306 744345

**Tony Backhurst**  
– 01483 271765

# Middle East





## Land Temp. (°C)

**How to get there** → Most divers fly straight into Israel's Red Sea resort of Eilat. There's a flight here every week and the airport is very close to the town, so no long transfers are required.

**Entry requirements** → No visa is required as it is stamped as you enter the country and is free. Israeli passport stamps can, in some extreme circumstances, cause problems if you are travelling to some Muslim countries. Therefore the immigration officials will stamp a separate sheet in your passport if requested.

**Climate** → Eilat's climate is fairly good all year round. In summer it is hot and in winter mild. The rest of Israel can be deceptively cold in winter and catches many people out. The temperatures given are for Eilat.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Hebrew is the national language, although English is pretty universally spoken. German, French and Italian are common too.

**Currency** → New shekel

**Tourist Authority** → Israel Government Tourist Office, 18 Great Marlborough Street, London W1V 1AF. Tel 0171 434 3651.

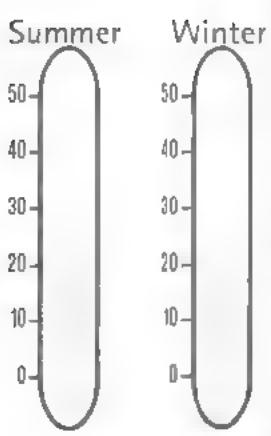
## The country

Israel was created in 1948 as a Jewish state on land that had been part of the British mandate for Palestine and there has been trouble between Palestinians and Jewish settlers ever since. The country or at least the land, is considered the Holy Land by Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The country is located at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba arm of the Red Sea and stretches northward into the Middle East. Eilat, Israel's foot hold on the Red Sea and its centre for diving, has been free of the violent clashes seen in places such as Hebron, the Gaza strip and even Jerusalem.

The entire eastern length of the country is dominated by the African Rift Valley – a great crack in the earth that created the Red Sea and has produced a fairly mountainous region.

Israel's stretch of Red Sea coastline is a mere seven miles long and into that area it has managed to fit the town of Eilat, supposedly the site of King Solomon's port, which he used to ship metals mined nearby. Eilat is sandwiched between the Jordanian town of Aqaba and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula.

It was the home of the package dive holiday until the likes of Hurghada and



## Water temp. °C

YOU HAVE BEEN DIVING

YOUR GATEWAY TO THE RED SEA

RED SEA DIVE TO EILAT ISRAEL

PADI 5 STAR FACILITY

MANTA DIVING CENTER

P.O. Box 390

The Coral Beach, Eilat Israel

Tel: 972-7-6376569

Fax: 972-7-6370681

<http://www.redseasports.co.il>

E-mail: [manta1@netvision.net.il](mailto:manta1@netvision.net.il)

Sharm opened up. These days Eilat seems content to attract other sun-seeking tourists to its hotels to take up the slack.

There is also an underwater observatory and an aquarium, so non-divers can enjoy the region's marine life.

## The diving

Far from being washed up (pardon the pun), Eilat's diving industry fought back and created a technically advanced and attractive alternative to the cheaper resorts over the border in Egypt.

Most of Eilat's diving is shore-based and, therefore, packages are generally cheaper, as it has fewer boats to finance.

Possibly the most obvious attraction for scuba divers and snorkellers is the Dolphin Reef project. This gives divers the chance to interact with dolphins in open water – an experience that some feel is genuinely moving and therapeutic. The dolphins are kept in a large enclosure (10,000sq-metres), but are not wild. They are not really captive either, because the gates are regularly opened, yet the incentive of free food keeps them coming back.

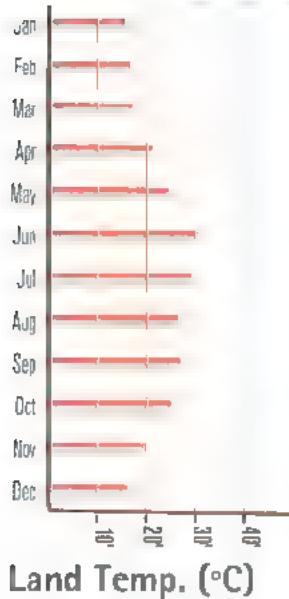
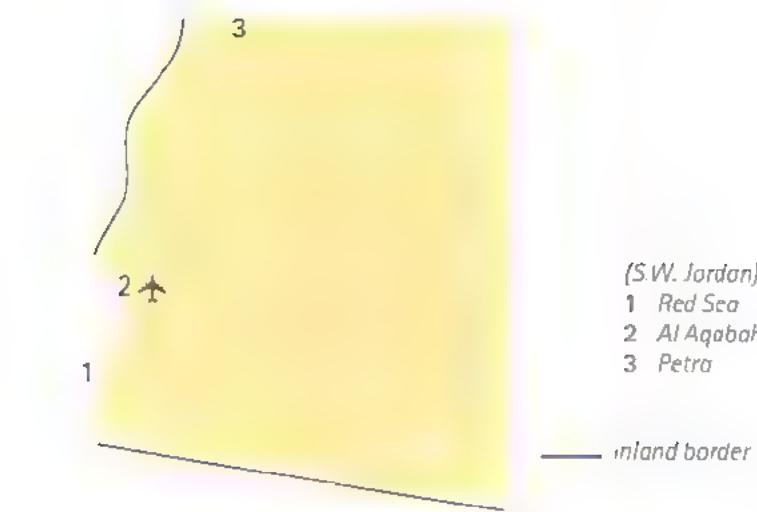
Because the dolphins are comfortable with humans, they are very approachable and will let both divers and snorkellers touch and caress them on occasion. Dolphin Reef is a commercial venture and a fee is charged for divers and snorkellers to enter. It can attract quite a large crowd though and during the summer season it can be very over dived.

For real diving, check out places such as Japanese Gardens and Moses Rock – two of Eilat's more famous and, therefore, popular sites, but they are by no means the only two. Moses Rock has benefited from being inside the nature reserve and continues to offer some of the best diving in the vicinity. The fish life is very used to divers, having grown up with them, and is not easily scared off.

Japanese Gardens is an equally fine site, but a little harder to reach. It is a little way out of town and requires the use of a boat to get there.

There are a couple of wrecks near Eilat. Both are quite small and one – the Sufa missile boat – was purposely sunk as a diver attraction. The other is a small aluminium gunboat, which lies out from the Aquasport Diving Centre.

As diving facilities go, Eilat has some top notch centres. Most are well equipped and offer a range of services including complete package holidays or simply dive instruction, dive guides or equipment hire.



**How to get there** → Jordan's main Red Sea town, Aqaba, has its own international airport. Flights are weekly from the UK. The border between Israel and Jordan is open for those who want to visit the two countries.

**Entry requirements** → A visa is required. Contact the embassy for full details.

**Climate** → Jordan, or more precisely Aqaba, experiences a warm winter and a hot summer. This doesn't reflect the rest of the country, because further north the winter temperatures can hover around freezing at times.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Arabic is the official language, but like so many tourist destinations English and many other European languages are spoken.

**Currency** → Jordanian dinar

**Tourist Authority** → Embassy of Jordan, 6 Upper Phillimore Gardens, London W8 8EH. Tel 0171 937 3685.

## The country

Jordan has remained in the shadow of more popular Red Sea resorts, but that isn't because it plays second fiddle. Aqaba can match many of the popular resorts but it has not received the backing it deserves.

Like its neighbour, Israel, Jordan has only a very small share of Red Sea coastline. Jordan's share, though, is a little more generous than Israel's, at 17 miles. This small section houses a bustling port and a tourist town.

Aqaba is opposite Eilat, which is clearly visible on the horizon, in the Gulf of Aqaba, the opposite arm of the Red Sea to Suez. The reason these two have grown up in such close proximity rests more with political issues than commercial. Jordan and Israel were enemies for years and it is only with the



# Jordan



recent signing of a peace treaty that the situation has eased. In the past any boat from Israel wandering into Jordanian waters was welcomed with the heavy hand of military gun boats.

## The diving

Jordan was a quick thinker when it came to its diving resource and as a consequence it has some of the best preserved reef systems in the Gulf of Aqaba. Being so far north means they are on the edge of coral's temperature tolerance in winter, so the more temperature tolerant soft corals dominate in certain areas. It doesn't seem to stop the hard corals growing into magnificent bommies.

The water conditions are generally good and conditions, both on the

surface and underwater, are usually calm, although in winter and summer a wind can whip up the surface a little.

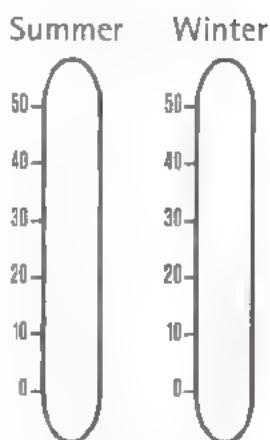
There is a good selection of dives to choose from out of Aqaba and, like Eilat, much of it is done from the shore.

One of the most spectacular shore dives is here the wreck of the *Cedar Pride*, which was intentionally sunk in 1986 as an artificial reef. She was originally a Lebanese cargo ship that was gutted by fire and was left in Aqaba Harbour to rot. After a while a request was made to King Hussein to sink her as a tourist attraction. He agreed to the proposal and now she is a spectacular site. She sits almost upright, is covered in soft corals and lies no more than a 100m from the shore.

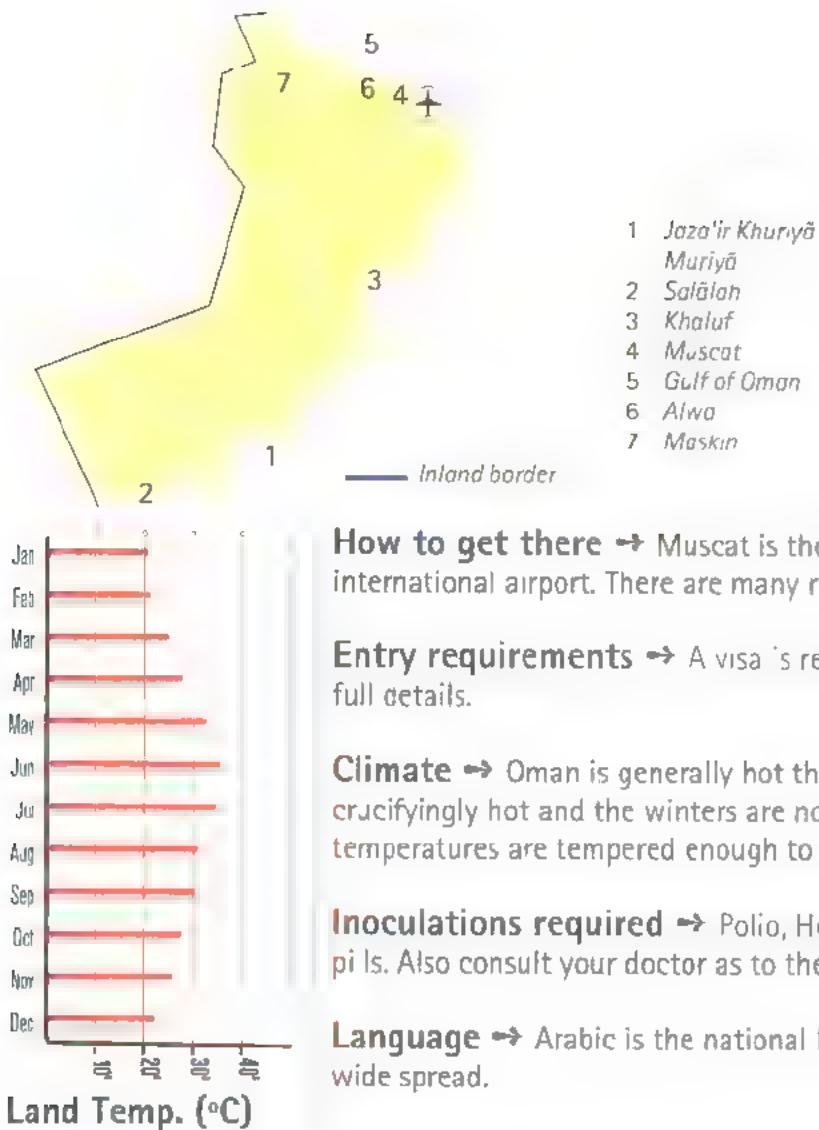
Other sites may not have the same visual impact, but still have incredible life. Sites such as Gorgonian I and II, for example, both offer outstanding underwater scenery.

The main diving operation here is the Royal Jordanian Diving Centre, but there are several others which are very good.

All offer guided dives, gear rental, dive instruction and several have agents in the UK that can offer full packages.



Water temp. °C



**How to get there** → Muscat is the capital city and location of the international airport. There are many regular flights from the UK.

**Entry requirements** → A visa is required, contact the Oman Embassy for full details.

**Climate** → Oman is generally hot throughout the year. The summers are scorchingly hot and the winters are not too much better, although the temperatures are tempered enough to make a stay pleasant.

**Inoculations required** → Polio, Hepatitis A+B, tetanus and anti-malaria pills. Also consult your doctor as to the current requirements.

**Language** → Arabic is the national language, although English is fairly widespread.

**Currency** → Omani rial

**Tourist Authority** → Omani Embassy 167 Queens Gate, London SW7 5HE  
Tel 0171 225 0001.

## The country

Oman is a fair sized country on the south eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula below Saudi Arabia and is designated as a Sultanate. It has about a thousand miles of coastline, but very little of it is reachable or diveable, simply because of logistics. The Musandam Peninsula, though is one area where diving is possible.

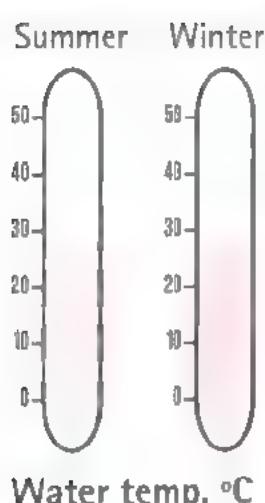
This is a very sensitive part of the planet and Oman has been its front line for years. Iran is on the other side of the Strait and at the far end of the gulf is Iraq. The Omani Navy runs regular patrols around the straits, so don't be surprised if a RIB arrives when you are diving, with a heavy machine gun bolted to the front.

## The diving

The main area for diving in Oman is in the Gulf. This body of water is much smaller than the Red Sea, but offers much the same sort of conditions and habitat. The coral is much more low lying, yet because of the lack of diving, much more pristine. Soft corals grow well here because they are force fed.

There are a couple of BSAC clubs in Oman who often lend a hand to divers wishing to visit the region, but don't count on any sophisticated dive centres.

The best diving tends to be in the Straits of Hormuz. Here life and water is funnelled through such a small gap that the concentrations of everything.



# Saudi Arabia

- 1 The Gulf
- 2 Red Sea
- 3 Mecca
- 4 Bahrain
- 5 Jiddah
- 6 Empty Quarter
- 7 Riyadh



**How to get there** → Jiddah, or Mecca, and Riyadh are the two largest towns in Saudi and both have international airports. There are regular flights from the UK.

**Entry requirements** → Saudi doesn't really like western visitors, unless they are in country to work and even then the restrictions are quite severe. Trying to get a tourist visa is just about impossible.

**Climate** → Saudi experiences a wide range of climates as it stretches from the northern reaches of the Red Sea down almost to the southern reaches.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → Arabic

**Currency** → Saudi riyal

**Tourist Authority** → None

## The country

Saudi is a huge country, the size of the whole of Western Europe, yet is locked firmly away from western visitors. Only Muslim pilgrims, those with working visas and sponsors within the country are allowed to enter. There are quite a few jobs for westerners within Saudi and many large western companies have set up business here. So there are some divers in country and, boy, do they have rich pickings.

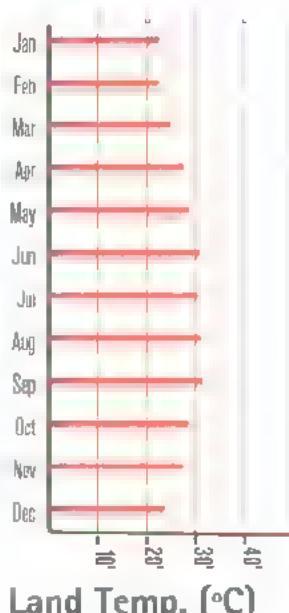
Saudi's share of the Red Sea coastline is more than any other nation's. Therefore the diving opportunities are incredible for those who are allowed in.

## The diving

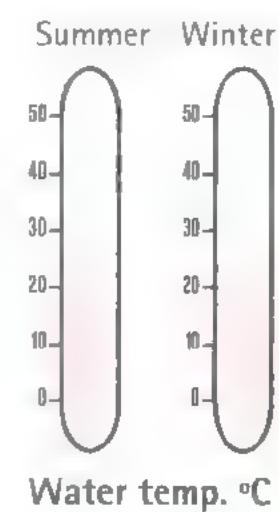
The Red Sea reefs off the coast of Saudi have had few visitors and so are some of the most outstanding in the world. Only a few ex-pats get to dive here, and the vast majority of the sites are untouched and certainly unexplored. The opportunities for new discoveries are staggering, but well off limits to travellers.

There are, however, a handful of dive shops, centres and charter boats. They are mainly in Jiddah, but Yanbu also has a couple of facilities too.

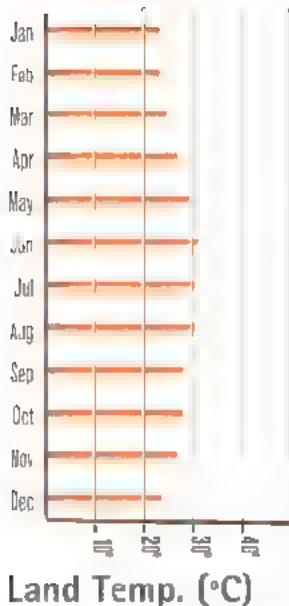
If you happen to find yourself employed in Saudi get yourself to the coast and get diving.



Land Temp. (°C)



Water temp. °C



**How to get there** → The main airport is at Sa'ana, the capital in the country's western region and a six hour journey through incredible mountain ranges is required to reach the Red Sea coast.

**Entry requirements** → A full passport and a visa is required. Contact the Yemen Embassy for details.

**Climate** → Yemen experiences two distinct weather patterns. The coasts are constantly hot and arid whereas the interior, which is quite high, has a more temperate cooler climate. The temperatures given are for the coastal area.

**Inoculations required** → Yellow fever is recommended, polio, hepatitis A+B, tetanus and anti malaria pills. Consult your doctor on current requirements.

**Language** → Arabic, but English is understood by some.

**Currency** → Yemen Riyal and Dinar although the US\$ is highly prized.

**Tourist authority** → Yemen Embassy, 57 Cromwell Road, London SW7 2ED. Tel 0171 584 6607.

## The country

The Republic of Yemen is located on the heel of the Arabian Peninsula, south of Saudi Arabia and west of Oman. It is a dry, arid country offering little in the way of shelter from the blistering heat in either summer or winter, although it is also studded with a mountainous interior which offers altitude to get you away from the heat. Coastal areas are hit by severe sand storms from time to time, so ensure you are prepared.

The country is still trying to pull itself back together after tensions back in the Seventies when Yemen was split between the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the People's Republic of South Yemen. For years tension and border wars prevented Yemen from developing. Peace was declared in 1981 but it wasn't until 1990 that the merger of the two states became official.

Now the country is looking to develop and tourism is one key area for improvement. There are several initiatives going on at present and it is hoped that there will soon be an infrastructure to support tourism.

But Yemen is still a developing country and facilities are basic and few and far between. The mud built towns are fascinating to explore and take you

# Yemen

back to a time forgotten by many in the west. A perfect example is the Old town in Sa'ana. This walled city lies within the urban sprawl that has become the capital. The building's date back to around the 17th century and the whole place is a hive of activity with traders and buyers all packed into tight streets. The smells of spices fill the air, the sounds of shouted Arabic fill your ears and you are swept along in a whirlwind of hustle and bustle.

The coast borders either the bottom of the Red Sea, opposite Eritrea or the Arabian Sea. Divers who come here tend to opt for the southern reaches of the Red Sea.

Please remember that everything's in short supply here. If a machine goes wrong it can take months to put right. Getting hold of something as rudimentary as a screw can turn into something of an expedition and a test of patience. You have been warned.

## The diving

Scuba diving is one part of the tourist industry that isn't going to hang around waiting for a good tourist infrastructure, especially when the whole thing can be done from a boat and liveabards are springing up already.

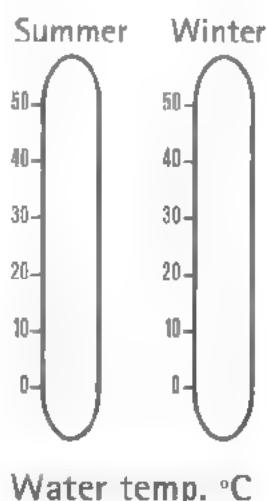
Mainly run by Italian operators, several Yemen-based liveabards are already being represented in the UK. However, the lower reaches of the Red Sea are not like the upper reaches. Plankton blooms very often spoil the visibility here, currents can be fierce and unpredictable and emergency services are a long way away.

That said Yemen offers some of the most amazing experiences. It is reputed to have the highest concentration of sharks in the Red Sea and just north of the Saudi border are the Farsan Islands, which offer a remote, rugged and exciting dive experience. If permission is granted, these islands offer some of the most unspoilt and exciting diving in the Red Sea.

Yet Yemen also has several offshore islands to dive, which have just the same experiences to offer. Sharks, rays and abundant fish life are common on all reefs. In fact, Yemen is a great place to encounter all sorts of special creatures from manta rays to tiger sharks.

The reef structures are very similar to those on the western shore of the Red Sea. Some form steep walls whereas others are classic coastal reefs with a gentle coral cover slope. All the regular species encountered in places like Egypt, Israel and Jordan are abundant, but what Yemeni reefs haven't got, however, are masses of divers and many are truly virgin dive sites. Experiences here really are adventurous. You can see parts of the sea bed and creatures that no man has ever clapped eyes on before. But you do need to take precautions as there are no emergency facilities in Yemen and so cautious diving is required.

At the moment Yemen is frontier diving at its best. It has hardship, the risk of breakdown, but it also has virgin reefs, outstanding marine life and amazing encounters. It is not for the faint hearted though as the culture and scenery can conspire against your schedule. But if you want a destination that is just emerging and are prepared to weather some hassle then Yemen is an ideal country to consider.



## Dive Centres

### Red Sea Sports Club

Manta Dive Club,  
Israel  
Tel: 00972 7 6376569  
Fax: 00972 7 6370655  
E-mail:  
[manta1@netvision.net.il](mailto:manta1@netvision.net.il)  
PADI, SSI, CMAS  
Training pool, hotel  
facilities, 2 classrooms,  
decompressor and full  
equipment facility, photo  
shop, equipment shop,  
new changing rooms,  
showers and sauna.

### Royal Diving Centre

PO Box 21,  
Aqaba 77110 Jordan  
Tel: 00962 3 201 70 35  
Fax: 00962 3 201 70 97  
PADI, BSAC, CMAS  
Fully equipped, friendly  
diving centre. Shore, boat,  
night, wreck dives. Discover  
scuba diving, snorkelling  
courses at all levels.  
Excellent pool available

### Scuba International

PO Box 30591,  
Dubai, UAE  
Tel: 00971 4 420553  
Fax: 00971 4 420174  
E-mail:  
[scubaint@emirates.net.al](mailto:scubaint@emirates.net.al)  
PADI. Full range of PADI  
courses, TDI courses,  
Nitrox rebreather  
Rebreathers for hire.  
Diving UAE East Coast and  
Musandam.

## Tour Operators

**DiveQuest**  
01254 826322

**Hayes & Jarvis**  
- 0181 222 7840

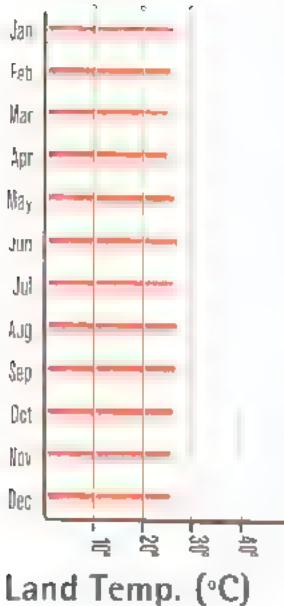
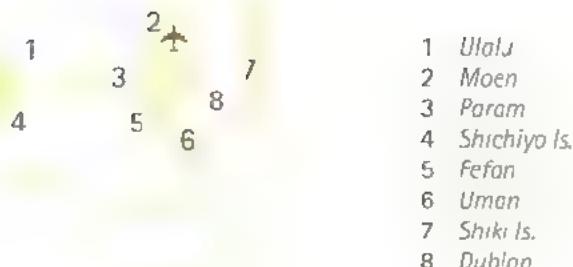
**Scubaway**  
- 01273 746261

**Sport Abroad**  
- 01306 744345

**Tony Backhurst**  
- 01483 271765

# South Pacific





**How to get there** → Continental Micronesia will take you to Moen in Chuuk from Guam. You can reach here through Hawaii, Singapore or Manila.

**Entry requirements** → A full passport

**Climate** → Chuuk is a tropical island, but although hot it does have distinct seasons. December to April is generally considered the best time to visit. August to November is the rainy season (although still good for diving) and from May to July the area suffers from plankton blooms.

**Inoculations required** → None.

**Currency** → The US Dollar seems to be the currency of choice especially at the hotels and on liveaboards

**Tourist Authority** → Truk Visitor's Bureau, PO Box FQ, Meon, Truk FSM 96942



## The country

Chuuk is better known for the lagoon that sits in the middle of most of the state's islands – Truk. This one lagoon is what brings most of the visitors here as it is the last resting place of the Japanese Imperial Navy's 4th Fleet's support vessels, but most divers don't need to be told that as the name Truk is spoken of with awe across the world. Few know the real story behind the wrecks and even fewer know anything about the nation of Chuuk.

# Chuuk

There are a total of 25 main islands that make up the nation, 11 of which surround Truk lagoon and 14 more islands and atoll make up the rest. Few tourists bother with the islands as they come here to dive, but fifty odd years ago the majority of the islands housed many Japanese troops, pilots, technicians and sailors. The war relics are now rusting in the jungle. Etan Island is worth a visit as it was once a huge Japanese airfield and there are several Japanese ruins. For the most part all the islands are covered in dense vegetation which has swallowed most of the relics and ruins, but several such as the lighthouse, the old Japanese command post, which is now the Xavier school and Nevo cave which houses a huge gun, are worth visiting.

Accommodation is restricted, but still quite good. The Truk Stop Hotel or the Truk Continental are the two favoured by dive tourists, although there are a couple of others.

The main town here is Weno, which is a rustic place full of South Pacific life and character. There are plenty of tourist eateries and a few souvenir shops etc, but on the whole it is just a rural town.

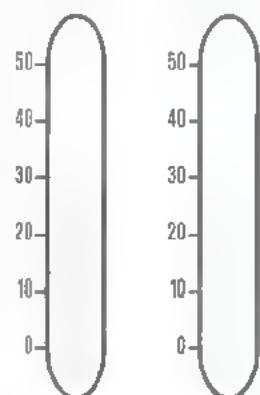
## The diving

The one and only reason people dive Chuuk's for the war graves of Truk lagoon. This place is a mecca for wreck diving fanatics and has been for years. The word fanatics isn't used lightly. Many of the wrecks here are very deep and mostly require divers to enter decompression zones, a practice many are unfamiliar with, even if it is part of their training. There are several within the no-decompression diving limits, and although brilliant they are not the best.

Truk is an awful long journey, but those divers that do make the effort, are rewarded with a host of artefacts from the WWII Imperial Japanese Navy 4th Fleet. There are no battleships here as they were taken out of the lagoon several days before the battle, but the support vessels - submarine tenders, cargo vessels and oilers are still outstanding.

There has been much debate about divers visiting the wrecks here. Virtually all, the wrecks are war graves and many believe that the Japanese sailors, who lost their lives here, deserve respect. Whatever your position on the subject, you cannot get away from the fact that as with most other popular diving destinations, Truk has seen better days. grave robbing divers have taken not only artefacts, but even the bones of the dead - sickening behaviour. There is still so much to see however and with a good dive guide you'll be thrilled to the bone, just remember though, many brave sailors lost their lives here and respect is of utmost importance.

Calm Season      Windy Season



Water temp. °C

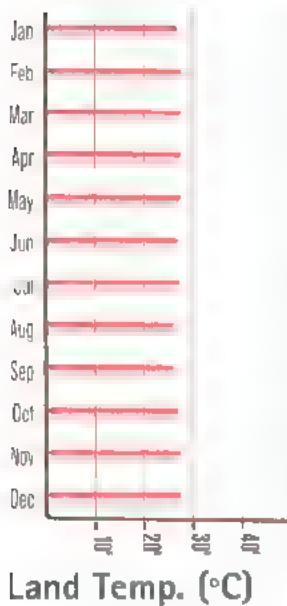


2

1

5

- 1 Ngulu Is.
- 2 Yap Is.
- 3 Ulithi  
(Mackenzie) Is.
- 4 Fais I.
- 5 Sorol Is.



Land Temp. (°C)

**How to get there** → From the UK, Singapore Airlines flies to Manila, where travellers overnight before catching a Continental Micronesia flight to Yap, sometimes via Guam

**Entry requirements** → A full passport

**Climate** → Yap experiences a tropical climate with good overall temperatures. There is a risk of typhoons, but this is the same all over the South Pacific. The best time to dive is from October to June.

**Inoculations required** → None.

**Currency** → US Dollars

**Tourist Authority** → None in UK

## The country

The nation of Yap is a chain of 14 islands, with the island of the same name as its capital. They are very unspoilt and under developed making a trip here a journey back in time. Many people here, especially out in the country, still dress traditionally and all are welcoming and friendly. In short Yap is a bastion – possibly the last – of true Micronesia culture. It is a land untainted and seemingly uninterested in the west and their consumer culture.

To explain, hand aid stone pathways connect villages, stone money, shipped by outriggers from Palau is still in circulation and the women go about their daily business bare-breasted – even in the main town and at the airport.

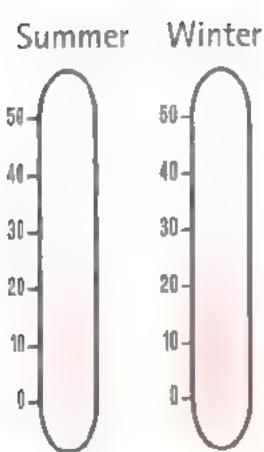
The capital, Colonia, is found on the main island and is a very quaint and basic town. Accommodation wise you are quite limited, but there are several hotels and one good resort called the Manta Ray Bay Hotel.

Out past Yap Island's barrier reef, are the rest of the islands, which are small, remote sandy atolls, spread over 600m miles of ocean. Life here is incredibly basic, yet the villages that exist do so in relative harmony and the people are always friendly.

## The diving

The diving here is pretty spectacular and is completely devoted to large shoals of pelagics, walls and the ever-present mantas. In fact Yap got its reputation as a spectacular diving destination from Mil Channel where many dive operators guarantee a manta sighting on every dive.

Yap is also a place to find large fields of lettuce coral and moving masses of antneas and some of the best walls in the entire Pacific.



Water temp. °C

# Marshall Islands



**How to get there** → To get to Micronesia you first have to get to Honolulu and transfer to Majuro Atoll. Continental Micronesia has regular flights.

**Entry requirements** → Generally you must have a valid passport and an onward or return ticket.

**Climate** → All of the islands are considered tropical oceanic and are hot all year round, but affected by wind and rain. From October to April, it can be quite windy and it tends to rain from April to June.

**Inoculations required** → None

**Language** → This varies depending on what island you are visiting and in some cases, which village. In resort areas English is widely spoken.

**Currency** → Depends on the island, but the US\$ is widely accepted.

**Tourist Authority** → None in UK

## The country

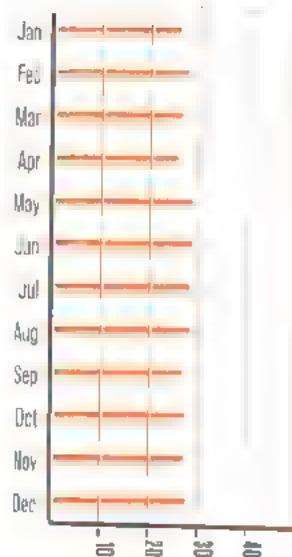
The Marshall Islands are part of the Federated States of Micronesia and consist of a collection of some 2,100 islands about 2,700 miles west of Hawaii. The island nation is similar to the Maldives in that each island group is the outer ring of a coral lagoon. The atolls form two rough chains lying north-west to south east approximately two hundred miles apart. They are divided as such with the more easterly chain known as Ratak, which translates as 'Sunrise' and the more westerly one called Ralik or 'Sunset'. The capital is Majuro Atoll where about half the 50,000 Marshall Islanders live. That means the other islands are very sparsely populated and many are uninhabited.

The Marshalls were a battlefield during WWII and as such many ships, planes and, funny enough, vehicles have ended up under the tropical seas here. Yet, at present, they are still a frontier diving destination.

The collection of dive centres across the nation couldn't even be called a handful and they are spread out across the nation, giving divers a treat. No other dive boats in sight, ever. Majuro is the main centre, but you'll also find Kwajalein Atoll worth a visit.

Visitors here should take in both the major atolls – Majuro and Kwajalein – for reasons you'll see in the diving section. However, many of the diving centres also offer extended trips to outer atolls.

One trip that is becoming more popular is to Bikini Atoll, a far outlying



coral outcrop made famous by the US nuclear tests.

The atoll was closed to all for years but, in 1996, the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory concluded that the risk of radiation from the waters and wrecks of Bikini are virtually zero. There has been diving there on a small scale ever since.



## The diving

For the most part the Marshalls offers some outstanding diving and is a mix between tropical coral reef formations and WWII wrecks.

Majuro has some excellent sites, one of which was a dump for old military vehicles. Called the Parking Lot, it lies close to the main town and is full of trucks, tanks and jeeps.

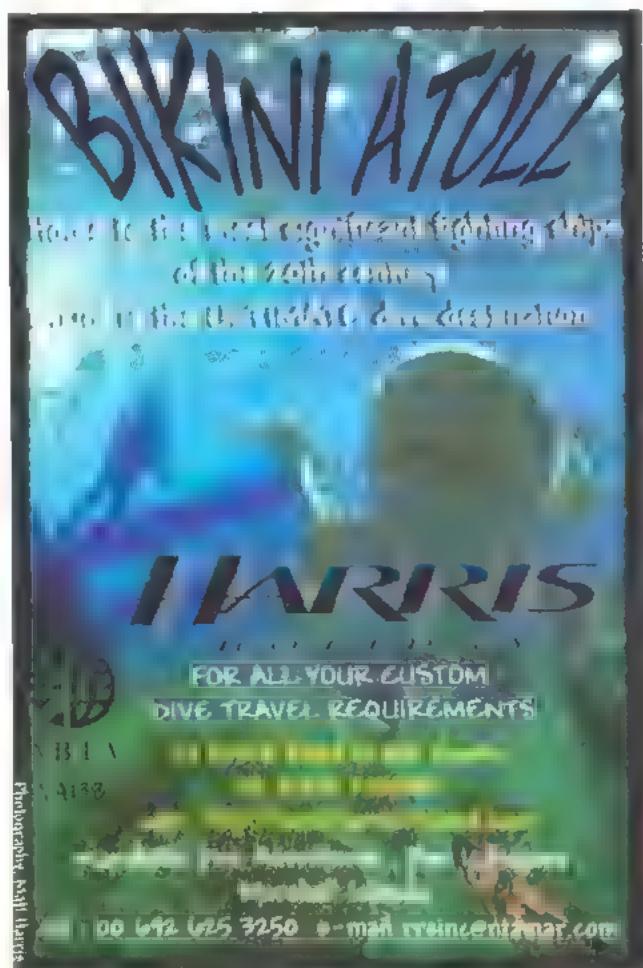
Visibility-wise the Parking Lot isn't as good as the rest of the sites around this atoll. Generally conditions are good with 30m+ visibility encountered. Dives take place on all sorts of coral formations such as classic reefs, walls and several pinnacles. These provide good, unspoilt diving with abundant fish life and a plentiful supply of sharks.

From Majuro, weather permitting, trips can be made to the neighbouring atoll of Arno, which has even more spectacular walls and better visibility. Several trips are run from Majuro including 3-4 day excursions to Mili Atoll and longer trips to Jaluit and Bikini.

Bikini is the last resting place of the world's only diveable wreck of an aircraft carrier, the *USS Saratoga*; the *HJMS Nagato*, the flagship of the WWII Imperial Japanese Navy and various other ships and submarines.

The wrecks are deep though and divers should be experienced and have a good knowledge of decompression. The flight deck of the *Saratoga* lies at 40m and most of the other wrecks are below that, but deep technical and trimix divers are greeted with some of the most spectacular wrecks they could ever hope to dive. Contact Harris Holidays for advice and bookings; its advertisement is on this page.

If Bikini is a wreck and technical divers' dream then Jaluit is a marine biologists and historians heaven. Getting to the Atoll is a question of proper logistics, but you are greeted with possibly the best wall dives in Micronesia, excellent fish life, bountiful sharks and it is also the last resting place of a few, yet very important, plane wrecks.



- 1 Ngarchelong
- 2 Ngardmau
- 3 Arai
- 4 Ngeremelengui
- 5 Ngchesar
- 6 Namu
- 7 Koror
- 8 Peleliu

**How to get there** → The easiest route is to take a Singapore Airlines flight from London to Manila, over night and catch a Continental Micronesia flight onto Palau.

6

**Entry requirements** → A full passport.

**Climate** → As with most other South Pacific nations Palau experiences a good climate, although Typhoons are a possibility at certain times. The best diving season is from October to June.

**Inoculations required** → None.

**Currency** → US dollars

**Tourist Authority** → None in UK.

## The country

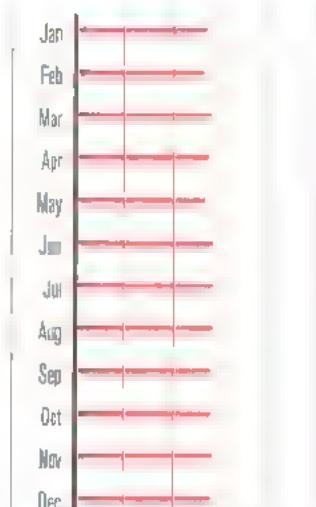
As with all South Pacific nations, Palau is a collection of many islands – 350 in all. And what's more, only eight are inhabited. Babelthuap, is the second largest island in Micronesia, after Guam, and makes up about 80% of Palau's total landmass and is the location of the international airport. Koror is the capital island and the town carries the same name.

The nation is the second to come out of the Trust Territory of the Pacific set up after the second world war and administered by the United States. Palau therefore is an independent state, however much of its income still comes from US aid and the majority of its workers are employed by the government.

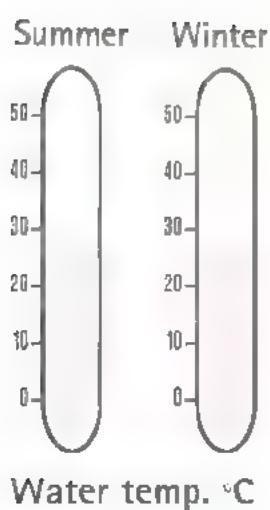
The Rock Islands, small limestone outcrops in the perpetual blue of the Pacific, are a big draw for tourists as they create an incredible scenery. Several of the larger stands have inland saltwater lakes which have been sealed off from the outside sea for millennia have developed quirks of nature. Many are now world famous thanks to the likes of the BBC Natural History Film Unit and the Discovery Channel. Jellyfish Lake is the most famous and snorkelling here among thousands of non-stinging jellyfish is an incredible experience.

These days Palau is becoming quite developed and large hotel chains and resorts are more the norm, as are Japanese tourists, but cheaper accommodation can still be found.

Diving operations are numerous and day boat diving is the main activity, although there are several liveaboards in operation now.



Land Temp. (°C)



## The diving

Palau was made famous by sites such as Blue Corner and New Drop-off where the rippling current decorated the blue water with large pelagics, beautiful reefs and myriads of reef fish, but dive operators are now discovering new sites as the race out to the favoured ones is getting a little crowded these days.

Unlike the wreck festooned sea floor of Truk, Palau offers the visiting diver a more back-to-nature dive style. The limestone islands have a mass of cave and cavern systems which add excitement to any dive and the coral reefs are so fertile that there is often not an inch left bare.

There is, however, a price to pay and that is the current. The current features so heavily in the diving here that many dive shops sell a diver anchoring device which is basically a rope with a hook attached so you can stop in the underwater mêlée and take in the scenery as everything else whizzes by.

Babeldaob reefs offer the chance to see giant Pacific mantas and there are a fair smattering of Japanese war wrecks to view, most of which are in shallower water than those at Truk. New sites discovered include the spectacular walls at Peleliu and Angaur, which are quite deep but very interesting and full of life. The conditions can be rough here and the depth means that these are sites for the advanced diver only.

The diving operations here are fairly relaxed, so don't expect too much in the way of a dive briefing or special instructions. Better to ask before a dive, rather than wait to be told what you will be doing.

## Tour Operators

### Sport Abroad

- 01306 744345

### Hayes & Jarvis

0181 222 7840

### Harris Holidays

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- 01254 826322

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The benefits of membership are subject to conditions. These conditions are supplied with the membership pack and are available on request or for inspection at PADI International Limited, Unit 7, St Philips Centre, Albert Road, St Philips, Bristol BS2 0PD. Tel +44 (0)117 300 7333.



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An added bonus with this policy is that it can also be used to cover a non-diving family holiday. When you consider that a two week travel insurance policy for a family of four going to say Florida is around £90.00 the value of DIVE SECURE becomes very clear.

The product is explained in greater detail on Mardon's Web site [mardon.co.uk/divetravel](http://mardon.co.uk/divetravel). The site includes a question and answer page to which anyone can contribute.

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Mention the word insurance and everyone turns off, but before you turn the page hang on because this could just save your life and your bank balance. Insurance, especially dive insurance, is like carrying a hospital, hyperbaric chamber and emergency return flight around with you. As any diver knows, although scuba diving is a safe pastime, things can go wrong and if they do it is usually going to cost a lot to put right. In the UK that cost is generally paid for you by the national health service and so the real costs of hyperbaric treatment is an unknown for us, but standard medical bills for such treatment runs at about £5000 per hour and can quickly run into tens of thousands of pounds.

This is why proper insurance cover while diving, especially abroad, is so important.

There are a number of different insurance packages on the market for the travelling diver, but before deciding which to go for let me give you some advice. Always prepare for the worst case scenario.

Let's take an example to explain this fully. Suppose you took out a travel package that covers you for medical bills up to £1million.

Sure, £1million sounds like a lot, but if you go to Papua New Guinea on a liveaboard and suffer a decompression accident, who is going to treat you? Well, the nearest hyperbaric recompression chamber for treating this sort of thing is in Townsville Australia. You will have to be air evacuated on a low flying aircraft all the way to Townsville and that's before any treatment is carried out. You then have to add the cost of the hyperbaric treatment, the doctors and nurses and the repatriation back to the UK. It isn't too hard to work out that your £1 million isn't going to last that long. Once your insurance money has run out, who picks up the rest of the tab? It could be you.

The moral of the story is always ensure you have ample medical insurance cover for the worst case scenario. Many standard travel policies, although cheap, cannot supply the cover which a diver in trouble will need, so steer clear. Look for specialist cover that takes the additional cost of hyperbaric medical treatment into account.

There are various companies offering this sort of specialist insurance cover around and most advertise regularly in the diving press. Their policies generally fall within three different categories:

**Standard travel with diving as an extra:** This is the most common package and is used as a standard travel policy with diving included. It covers you for everything from falling down steps and breaking a bone to theft etc. The diving cover is generally a loading of the premium by 10-15% extra to include the additional cost of medical treatment.

**Standard travel with diving included:** This again is a standard travel package, but there is no loading of the premium. Diving is seen as just another pastime and covered automatically.

**Medical:** Unlike the travel packages, a medical insurance package does not cover you for accidents outside diving, theft, broken items etc. It is simply to provide specialist medical facilities to you in the event of a diving accident. At first this seems to be an expense way of working, but if you are looking to cover for the worst case scenario rule, it is often the best. Medical packages are usually sold with a travel package.

So what do you get for your money. Well, good insurance cover will give you access to an international assistance co-ordinator and will take care of all the financial worries.

An Assistance Co-ordinator is a separate company that will take care of all the arrangements for your medical treatment, evacuation to a medical facility or even your repatriation home. In an emergency, one call to your international assistance co-ordinator should be all you need.

British Insurance companies use a number of international assistance co-ordinators. All have 24 hour operators and doctors on call, however, what many haven't got are hyperbaric doctors on staff. Although this isn't necessary, it is an advantage if you require hyperbaric treatment because the assistance co-ordinating company can easily liaise with the hyperbaric doctor on the scene.

How are you going to find out all this information from just a telephone call to the insurance agent or even an advertisement in a magazine? Easy, ask questions and, if necessary, ask to see the specifics of the cover. This last point is important. Too many people buy insurance cover and then fail to read the information sent to them. Sure, the insurance forms and information sheets look heavy going and long-winded, but they should all be read and understood. If you don't understand a procedure or what you are actually covered for phone the company or the broker to find out. Insurance companies work hard on producing the information, which is like a instruction manual for their products. The least you can do is read and understand how it works.

Insurance isn't something to begrudge paying. It is a valuable part of your holiday preparations. Your life is invaluable and the cost of a good insurance package is, therefore, insignificant in comparison.



## The alternative is.... IDEC from Dive Master INTERNATIONAL DIVING EMERGENCY CARD

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We know from sad experience that many divers do not give serious consideration to their life risk. You may have a current life policy, but not have checked it carefully to see if it covers the risk of sports diving and it is adequate to cover your liabilities in the event of your death. Whilst our IDEC insurance gives specific life cover as a result of a diving accident, annual IDEC holders have the opportunity to review their life assurance needs by applying for Dive Master Life Assurance which covers death as the result of any eventuality, not just diving accidents. Make sure your loved ones are adequately provided for.

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### DIVE MASTER TRAVEL COVER

Travel insurance for divers is one of our specialities & in addition to all the other usual Travel Insurance benefits, we also provide cover for EU citizens and certain foreign nationals travelling from their home country. Cover is also provided for diving equipment delayed or lost in transit. For frequent travellers we have a multi-trip insurance for up to 60 days travel at any one time and includes 17 days winter sports cover.

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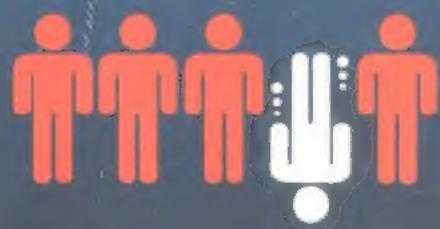


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